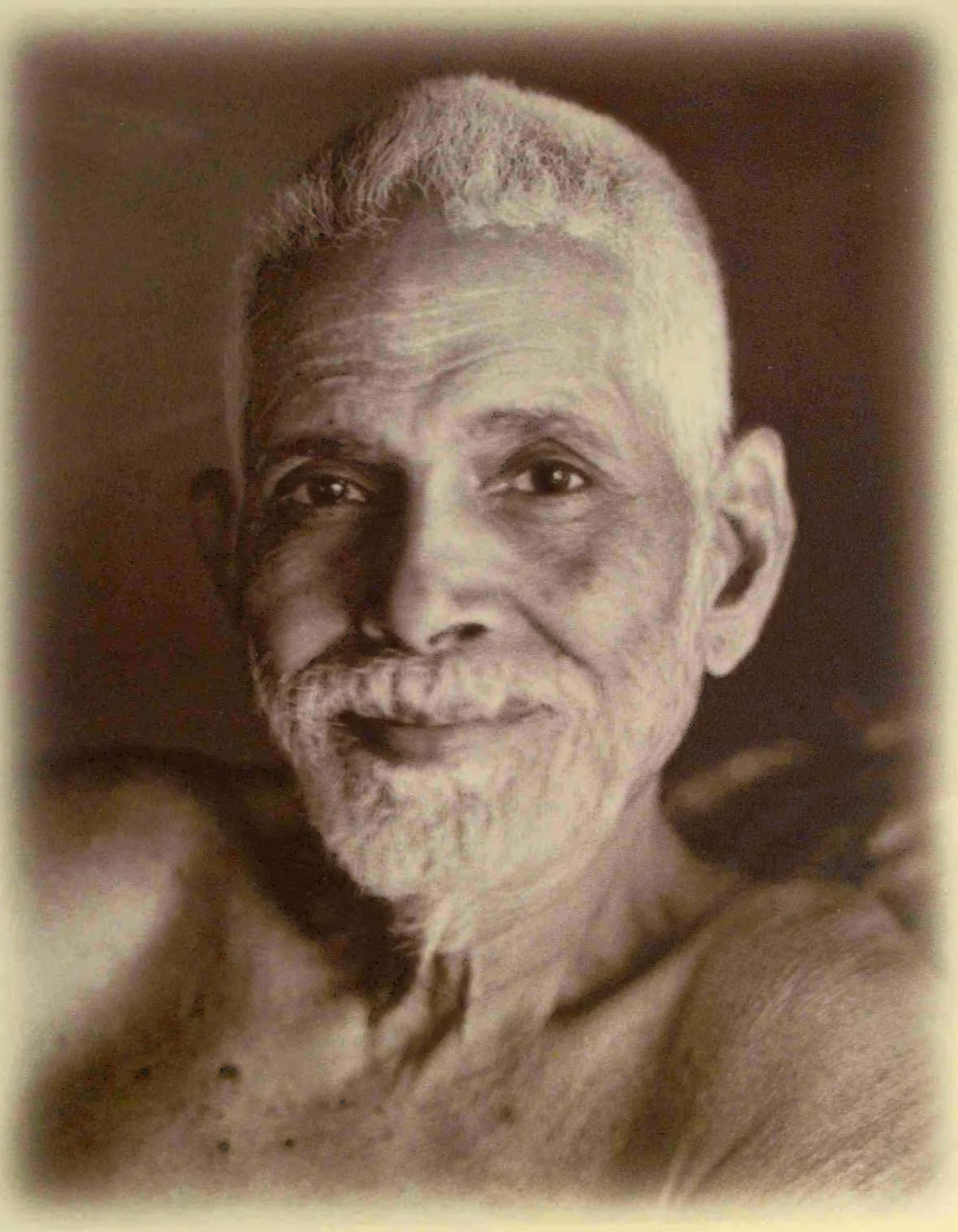
The POWER *of the* PRESENCE



DAVID GODMAN

Part One

The Power Of The Presence

The Power Of The Presence

Transforming Encounters With
Sri Ramana Maharshi

Part One

Edited by
David Godman

By the same author

Be As You Are
No Mind – I Am The Self
Papaji Interviews
Living By The Words Of Bhagavan
Nothing Ever Happened (three volumes)
Annamalai Swami: Final Talks

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Arunachala reflected in Pali Tirtham

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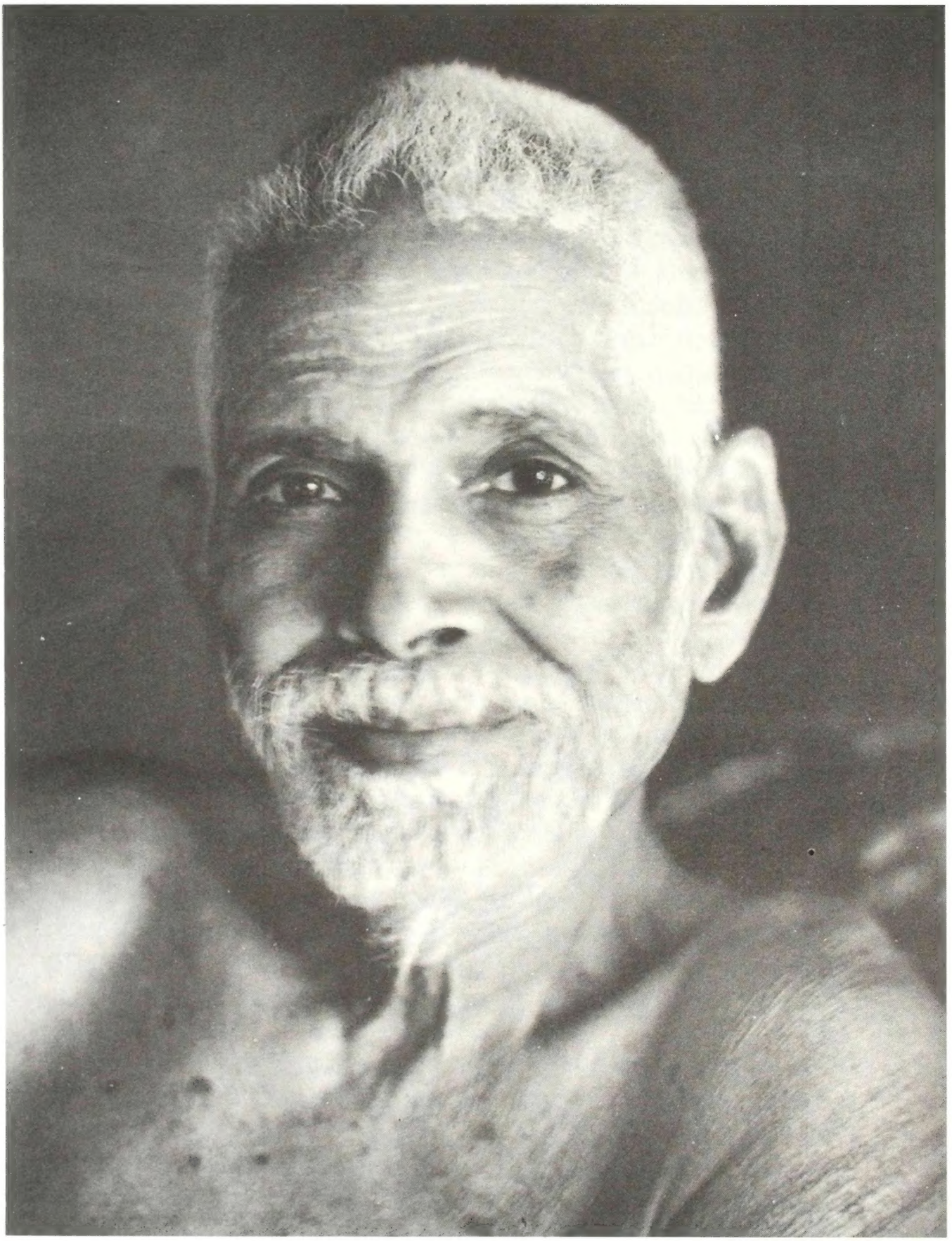
I should like to thank Dev Gogoi for designing the cover.

My proof-reading skills leave much to be desired, so I should like to thank Govind, Dev Gogoi and my wife Vasanta for discovering many errors and for offering advice that has measurably improved the quality and clarity of the text. However, if any textual or factual errors have survived our collective scrutiny, I will, as editor, take full responsibility for them.



Sri Ramana Maharshi

Preface

In the mid-1980s I began to collect accounts that had been written by various devotees of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. Rather than focus on the many relatively short articles that had appeared in various journals, most notably *The Mountain Path*, I directed my search towards longer accounts that had appeared in various Indian languages and which were consequently relatively unknown to the English-speaking world. My aim was to produce an anthology of fairly long first-person accounts that would chronicle in detail how Bhagavan's power and grace had transformed the lives of people who had come into contact with him. Though I collected a vast amount of material, the book never made it to the press. One reason I held back from publication was that I was never quite satisfied that I had done a proper, thorough job. As an inveterate researcher on all matters connected with Sri Ramana Maharshi, I was not willing to call a halt to the preliminary collection phase of the work until I was satisfied that there were no more stories waiting to be unearthed. The main cause for the delay in publication, though, was that my research took me off in unexpected directions. Two of the prospective contributors, Annamalai Swami and Papaji, proved to be so fascinating and compelling, I ended up turning their material into full-length books. In fact, in the last fourteen years I have produced six books on them, totalling over 1,600 pages, from material I originally thought would occupy far less than 100 pages of this anthology. During those years work on this project effectively stopped and I have only recently returned to it.

I have decided to eliminate the chapters I originally compiled on Annamalai Swami and Papaji since my accounts of their experiences with Sri Ramana have already been published elsewhere. Even though I have eliminated these two long chapters, the remaining material is so great, I have decided to publish the accounts in two separate volumes. My work on the second book is almost finished and I hope it will appear within a few months of part one.

I originally intended to include a long introductory essay in

which I would have attempted to show all the different ways that Sri Ramana's grace worked on the various people who approached him. I have abandoned this option since I believe that the contributors I have selected perform that job quite adequately by themselves. My current editorial goal is therefore a more limited one. I want to introduce readers to material on Bhagavan that they may not have encountered before and, by juxtaposing accounts of devotees with widely differing backgrounds, I want to show the many different relationships Bhagavan had with devotees who came to him and in many cases surrendered their lives to him.

I have arranged these testimonies in an approximate chronological order. The first three chapters are by devotees who knew Bhagavan during his early years at Arunachala. The two subsequent sections were written by devotees who had extensive contact with Bhagavan from the 1920s onwards, while the final two accounts come from people who met Bhagavan during the last fifteen years of his life.

I have contributed brief italicised introductions to six of the chapters, mostly to give background information about the contributors, some of whom seem to be a little reluctant to talk about themselves as they tell their stories. The remaining author, Bhagavan's boyhood friend Rangan, reveals enough about himself to make any such editorial introduction redundant.

Each devotee in this book has his or her own distinctive voice. I have tried to interfere as little as possible as they narrate their stories because I don't want the original perspectives and attitudes of the contributors to be contaminated by too much editorial interference. However, since the accounts I have included do at times presuppose a knowledge of Bhagavan's life and teachings along with a passing familiarity with Hindu culture, philosophy and terminology, I have annotated the text with explanatory notes of my own that I hope will give context and background to some of the stories being told. For the benefit of those readers who are unfamiliar with the main events of Sri Ramana's life, I have also included a very brief chronological summary at the end of the book.

Though many people contributed their expertise to this book, I take full responsibility for its final shape and form. Collecting, editing and arranging this material in the 1980s gave me enormous pleasure. Going through these accounts again, some

of which I had not read for more than ten years, I can only marvel at the awesome, effortless power that flowed from Bhagavan and transformed the lives and hearts of those who were pulled into his orbit. When I first came across some of these stories, I felt as if I had discovered buried treasure. Now, many years later, I feel that the time is now right to put this treasure into the public domain so that everyone who feels drawn to Sri Bhagavan can have a share in it.

Preface to the second edition

Some of the translations that appear in Sivaprakasam Pillai's chapter have been revised, and a few extra verses have been added at the end of Sadhu Natanananda's chapter. I have corrected all the typographical errors that have been brought to my attention since the book was first printed. If any still remain, please let me know, and I will correct them in future printings.

DAVID GODMAN,
Tiruvannamalai, September, 2001

Rangan

In June 1907 I went with my wife, mother and daughter to see Bhagavan. It was the first time I had seen him since we were at school together.

'Do you recognise me?' I asked Bhagavan.

With great difficulty he muttered the name 'Rangan' in guttural tones. In those days, because Bhagavan spoke little, he found it very difficult to use his voice.

He turned to Palaniswami [Bhagavan's attendant], pointed at my mother and asked, 'Do you recognise her?'

My mother had visited Bhagavan when he was residing in Pavalakundru[1] in the 1890s, so Palaniswami might have recognised her.

My mother had already told me about her first visit. It seems that on that occasion she had asked Palaniswami whether Bhagavan would eat some fruit if she offered him some. It did not occur to her to address Bhagavan directly because at the time she did not think he was conscious of her presence. However, Bhagavan heard her remark and responded to her query by stretching out his hand. My mother peeled a banana and gave it to him. Bhagavan ate it.

'Does he walk?' she asked Palaniswami.

Bhagavan got up and walked a few steps to demonstrate that he could move about.

'Does he speak?' asked mother, still dealing with Palaniswami.

Bhagavan did occasionally speak, but on this occasion he kept quiet. Many years later Bhagavan talked to me about this incident.

'In those days,' he told me, 'I was speaking only one or two words with Palaniswami. It was difficult to speak even those few words, so I spoke rarely. I would have spoken to your mother, but I was afraid that if I spoke and my family heard about it, they would drag me back to Madurai. So I kept quiet.

[1] Pavalakundru is a temple located on a rocky mound to the north of the main Arunachaleswara Temple. Bhagavan lived there briefly in the 1890s.

'When your mother came for the first time to see me, she was frightened by my ascetic appearance and attire.

'She asked me, "Have your father's philanthropy and charity fructified into this?"

'My hair was all matted, my body was completely covered with dust and I was sitting on the rocks on the mountain. She went away because she could not bear to see me in this state. Also, she felt that she could do nothing to help me.'

After a short pause Bhagavan added, 'That is why none of you came, except for your mother. You thought that a dirty ascetic was not worth seeing, so you didn't bother to come. Isn't that so?'

Bhagavan told me that when he stayed at Pavalakundru, the place where my mother met him in the 1890s, he was never aware of the passage of time. Sometimes, he said, when his awareness of the world returned, he would notice that it was early morning. At other times he would open his eyes and find that it was either noon or night. He had no awareness of how much time had passed since he last opened his eyes. Sometimes, when he tried to stand up, his head would reel and he would lose his balance. When this happened he concluded that he must have recently spent many days in a state in which he had not been conscious of the world. Apart from these periodic bouts of weakness, he said that he had no other way of detecting the passage of time.

'Didn't you have any food in those days?' I asked.

Bhagavan replied, 'When there is no consciousness of the body, the bodily functions are also suspended.'

I deduced from this comment that Bhagavan did not need food to sustain himself during this period. [2]

At the time of my departure, after this first visit, I told Bhagavan, 'You have reached great heights'.

Bhagavan replied, 'The far-off mountains look even and smooth'.

[2] From *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, letter 105:

'In the early days after my coming here, ... I had no food and no sleep. When there is movement of the body, you need food. If you have food, you need sleep. If there is no movement, you do not need sleep. Very little food is enough to sustain life. That used to be my experience...[but] except when one is absorbed in motionless concentration of mind, it is not possible to give up food or sleep altogether.'

I felt that he was telling me that one could become a *jnani* [an enlightened being] even while living an ordinary householder's life. He seemed to be telling me that there was nothing special or great in physical renunciation.

I did not return for many years. When I finally came for *darshan* again, Bhagavan had moved to Skandashram. As I approached him, he was washing his face near the parapet wall. He recognised me even from a distance.

When I still had to climb four or five steps to reach Skandashram, Bhagavan called out to his mother, 'Amma! Rangan is coming!'

'Let him come,' she answered.

I went in the entrance and prostrated before him.

This time he said to me, '*Darshan* [seeing or being seen by] of holy people is not easily attainable. It is better to visit them often. They get the cloth woven and keep it ready for wear.'

I understood this to mean that if one gets Bhagavan's grace, one will attain *jnana* [enlightenment] without any effort. Though Bhagavan had given this promise and assurance, at this time I was still not certain whether I was receiving Bhagavan's grace, or even whether I was eligible for it. I didn't dare to ask Bhagavan directly about this, but a little later on this visit I tried to get an assurance by asking Bhagavan's mother instead.

'Mother, do you know whether I have a share in your son's earnings?'

I thought that we were alone, but mother called out to Bhagavan, 'Did you hear what Rangan said?'

Bhagavan appeared, smiled and replied, 'Yes, yes! Is he not also one of us? Certainly he has a share.'

The next time I met Bhagavan I was on my way to Madras in search of a job. My financial circumstances were not in a good state at that time. Bhagavan seemed to know this even though I never mentioned the subject.

As soon as I prostrated at his feet he said to me, 'Look here Rangan. A man, by himself, can go anywhere in the world and get by somehow. But women and children are different. Have you provided enough for the maintenance of your wife and children at home?'

I tried to reassure him by saying that I had given them some money but I discovered afterwards that Bhagavan had not been satisfied by my assurance. A few days later, when my elder

brother arrived at Skandashram, Bhagavan asked him how my family was getting on, and whether they were being inconvenienced by a lack of money. I was not there at the time because I had continued with my trip to Madras to look for a job. I had only stayed a few days with Bhagavan because I knew that it was imperative for me to find some way of supporting my family.

My brother told Bhagavan that the money I had given to my family before my departure had been spent and that the family was now being greatly inconvenienced on account of their lack of funds.

My attempts to find a job in Madras were unsuccessful. I decided to return home via Tiruvannamalai and have Bhagavan's *darshan* again. As soon as I saw Bhagavan, he brought up the subject of my family problems.

'You told me that you had given some money for your family's maintenance, but your brother tells me that they are suffering due to a lack of funds. Is this so?'

I kept quiet, unable to give an answer. I had tried to hide my inability to support my family from Bhagavan, but he of course could not be fooled. I had not been lazy. I had given my family all the money I could spare and I had gone looking for work, but I also knew that I had failed to tell Bhagavan the full extent of our problems. I had excused myself at the time by thinking that since Bhagavan knew everything anyway, he could bring about any change in my life if he so desired.

My inability to answer Bhagavan's probing query effectively ended the conversation, but that night, when I was lying on my bed, Bhagavan came and sat next to me. I got up at once and sat by his side.

'Rangan,' he asked, 'are you not able to sleep? Are you worried about the financial difficulties of your family? Will ten thousand rupees be enough for you?'

Again, I was unable to reply.

While Bhagavan was sitting on my cot, he told me, 'A man may dream that he is being beaten and that he is in pain. During the dream state all that seems true enough. But on waking, he laughs at the dream experience. Likewise, when he awakens to enlightenment, he will realise that this entire world is a mere dream.'

I felt that Bhagavan was telling me not to worry too much

about the affairs of a world that was ultimately unreal.

Bhagavan took my family troubles very seriously, but he was also able to joke about them.

On this same visit, for example, as we were doing *giri pradakshina* [walking around Arunachala] together, he playfully remarked, 'There are many herbs on this mountain that can transform any metal into gold'.

I felt that he was teasing me, so I kept quiet. Bhagavan made fun of me like this many times.

Sometimes he would merely laugh at my gloomy, depressed state and say, 'Are you worrying because you have no money?'

I eventually got a job in an automobile company, selling buses. Since I got a commission on each bus sold, I was soon able to raise the Rs 10,000 that Bhagavan had spoken about. This money was enough to pay off my debts and to perform the marriages of two of my daughters.

I never mentioned my financial difficulties to Bhagavan, nor did I ask him for help. I left all these things to him. Bhagavan himself, without any prompting from me, took care of all my financial difficulties.

I used to tell him, 'The burden of my family is yours. I am merely a puppet in your hands.'

Because I had a large family, which seemed to grow larger every year, I could never entirely rid myself of worries about money. In order to console me, Bhagavan once told me the following story.

'While a man was meditating intensively in order to get *jnana,* Lord Siva appeared before him and asked him what he wanted.

' "Give me poverty and troubles all the time!" requested the devotee.

' " What is this?" exclaimed Siva. "You could ask for so many good or great things. What is this strange thing you have asked for?"

'The devotee replied, "When we mortals have wealth, our eye does not see and our ear does not hear properly. If I am immersed in the world, I will always be in bondage, caught in the cycle of birth and rebirth. Poverty will make me always remember you."'

'Can we not get *jnana* while enjoying wealth and comforts?' I asked.

'Wealth is, without doubt, an obstacle,' replied Bhagavan, 'but unless one does good deeds, the desire for knowledge will not arise.'

I was in and out of debt for most of my life. In the late 1920s, when I was back in debt again, Bhagavan found another opportunity to make fun of my worries about money. I saw him talking earnestly to a Muslim and assumed that it must be about some spiritual matter.

However, when the Muslim went away, Bhagavan turned to me and said with a laugh, 'Do you know what that Muslim was telling me? You worry that you have many debts. I also now have a debt of five hundred rupees! It seems I purchased some combs and soap in his shop on credit.'

I discovered that the previous manager of the ashram had bought all these articles on credit from the Muslim shopkeeper. Since that manager had now left the ashram, the shopkeeper had come to Bhagavan to find out how he could recover his money.[3]

Feeling very sad that something like this should have happened, I went immediately to Madras to discuss the matter with a wealthy devotee. The devotee came at once to Tiruvannamalai, scolded the shopkeeper for giving so many things on credit, and settled the bill by giving him Rs 250.

When I started to visit Bhagavan regularly at Skandashram, it occurred to me that it would be good if I became a *sannyasin* [mendicant monk]. I knew that this was a foolish and irresponsible dream because it would leave my family, already in a precarious financial position, with no one to support them. However, the thought would not leave me. One night, while I was lying in my bed at Skandashram, I was unable to sleep because this thought kept recurring so strongly.

As I was turning uneasily in my bed, Bhagavan came to my side and asked me, 'What is the matter? Are you in pain?'

[3] Dandapani Swami briefly managed the ashram in the late 1920s. The unpaid bills were his. He was succeeded by Bhagavan's brother who was known to everyone as 'Chinnaswami', which means 'Little Swami' or 'Younger Swami'. Chinnaswami managed the ashram till his death in 1953.

The figure of Rs 500 sounds excessively high. In the 1920s that sum would have been enough to buy soap and combs for just about everyone in Tiruvannamalai. If the sum is correct, there were probably many other items on the bill.

'Venkataraman [Bhagavan's childhood name],' I replied, 'I want to adopt *sannyasa.*'

Bhagavan went away and came back with a copy of *Bhakta Vijayam,* an anthology of the lives of some famous saints who lived in western India many centuries ago. He opened the book and read out the story in which Saint Vithoba decided to take *sannyasa.* In the story his son, Jnanadeva, who is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, gave him the following advice.

'Wherever you are, whether in worldly society or the forest, the same mind is always with you. It is the same old mind, wherever you reside.'

After reading this out Bhagavan added, 'You can attain *jnana* even while you are living in *samsara* [worldly activities]'.

'Then why did you become a *sannyasin*?' I countered.

'That was my *prarabdha* [destiny],' replied Bhagavan.[4] 'Life in the family is difficult and painful, no doubt, but it is easier to become a *jnani* while living as a householder.'

I discovered later that this was Bhagavan's standard response to all people who asked him if they could give up all their worldly obligations. Once, for example, years later, a French scholar came to Bhagavan and asked him many questions.

After hearing Bhagavan's replies he said, 'I don't want to go back to France. I want to stay here and be with you always.'

'Where is the need?' responded Bhagavan. 'You can follow the quest "Who am I?" at all times even while you are living in your own country.'

Living with Bhagavan induced a spirit of renunciation in many people, including myself, but Bhagavan always discouraged his devotees from taking the final step of physical renunciation. I once overheard two devotees talking about this.

One said to the other, 'If you go to see Bhagavan frequently, he will make you into a *sannyasin*'.

The other devotee knew that this was not true, but he still pretended to be afraid. He went to Bhagavan and asked him to enlighten him.

[4] Though it is true that Bhagavan abandoned his family in 1896 to live at Arunachala, he was never formally initiated into any of the traditional orders of *sannyasins*. It should also be noted, in the context of this conversation, that his renunciation of a worldly life came after his Self-realisation.

'I have been told that if I come to you often, you will make me a *sannyasin.* If I become a *sannyasin,* I will lose my salary of Rs 1,000. What will then happen to my wife and children?'

Bhagavan, who must have known that the devotee was not seriously worried, replied, 'Everyone will eventually get what he wants'.

My urge to take *sannyasa* subsided and eventually it disappeared. Though Bhagavan himself had abandoned the world at an early age, I came to understand that it was my particular destiny to stay in the world, work, and look after my growing family. As a householder I also had the advantage of knowing that I could depend on Bhagavan to look after my family and me whenever we were in need of assistance. There were many occasions when we needed help and I soon got into the habit of telling Bhagavan all about my family troubles on my visits to Skandashram.

On one of these occasions Bhagavan turned to me and said, 'You think that your own troubles are very great. What do you know about my troubles? Let me tell you about one incident that happened to me. Once, while I was climbing a steep part of the mountain, I was holding on to a rock to keep my balance. The rock was loose and would not take my weight. I lost my balance, fell onto my back and was partly buried by a small avalanche of stones. I managed to remove them and stood up. I immediately noticed that my left thumb was dislocated. It was hanging loosely near the little finger. I pushed the thumb back into its socket and went home.'

I think that Bhagavan was understating the extent of his injuries, for while he was relating this incident, his mother came out of Skandashram and remarked, 'I cannot bear to recall that dreadful accident. He came home bleeding all over. He was in such a bad condition, I don't even like to think about it any more.'

I got on very well with Bhagavan's mother because we had known each other when she lived in Madurai. While I was talking to her one day she mentioned that she had once had a vision in which many snakes were wound around Bhagavan's neck, chest and legs. After a short while they all crept away. I think Bhagavan gave her this vision to remove from her mind the illusion that he was her son.

On another occasion, when Bhagavan's mother and I were in

Skandashram, she told me, 'Ten days ago, at about this time, I was looking steadily at Bhagavan. His body gradually disappeared and in its place I saw the *lingam* of Tiruchuzhi.[5] The *lingam* was very bright. I could not believe my eyes. I rubbed them but I still saw the same, bright *lingam*. I was frightened because I thought that my son was leaving us for ever. Fortunately, the *lingam* gradually transformed itself into Bhagavan's body.'

After hearing her account I looked at Bhagavan for confirmation or comment, but he just smiled and said nothing. In those days my son was writing a book called *Bhagavan Parinayam* [*The Marriage of Bhagavan*] in which Bhagavan marries *jnana kanya* [the bride *jnana*]. I told him this story of Bhagavan's accident and he incorporated it in his manuscript. A few months later, when my son read out his book before Bhagavan, Bhagavan asked him how he knew about this particular incident.

'My father told me,' replied my son.

'Oh!' said Bhagavan, 'Did he really tell you about all that?'

The other devotees were curious to know more about this particular incident because none of them had heard about it before, but Bhagavan said 'It was nothing' and diverted their attention to something else.

I had two strange but similar experiences with Bhagavan. The first took place on the mountain. Bhagavan had taken me to the top of the hill and shown me the place where the Karttikai *jyoti*[6] is lit and a few other places. After sunset we climbed down and slept at Seven Springs.[7] While I was sleeping at Bhagavan's

[5] The temple in the town where Bhagavan was born. Bhagavan spent the first twelve years of his life there.

[6] Karttikai is the name of the Tamil month that runs from mid-November to mid-December. A ten-day festival in this month culminates in the lighting of a fire (*jyoti* means light) in a huge cauldron that is placed on the summit of the hill. The ceremony commemorates a puranic story in which Siva demonstrates his superiority over Brahma and Vishnu. When Rangan told this story, the cauldron was permanently located on the peak of the mountain, but after it was stolen one year, the temple authorities decided that they would carry up the cauldron a few days before it was needed and bring it down again a week or so after the conclusion of the festivities.

[7] An area of the hill about two-thirds of the way to the summit. For most of the year the natural springs that occur there are the highest source of running water on the mountain.

feet, a vision of him appeared to me on all sides. When it had disappeared I told Bhagavan what had happened, but he declined to make any comment on it.

The other incident was both strange and mysterious. I left Skandashram for a short period of time after first noticing that Bhagavan was sleeping there, inside the door. When I returned, I saw him sitting outside on a bed. I thought nothing of it until I went inside the ashram and saw that Bhagavan was still sleeping inside, in the position I had seen him when I left the ashram.

When I told Bhagavan about this later, he smiled and said, 'Why did you not tell me then itself? I could have caught the thief!'

This was a typical example of Bhagavan's response to the supernatural. If such events were reported to him, he would either ignore them or pass them off as a joke. This was because he didn't want any of his devotees to be sidetracked from their main goal of realising the Self into an unproductive interest in miraculous phenomena.

My own experiences and the events I witnessed had convinced me that Bhagavan was a very great being, but at the same time, the fact that we had been friends who had played together as children made it easy for me to talk to him and be with him. I didn't have that feeling of reverential awe that left many visitors tongue-tied in his presence. And since I had known Bhagavan from his earliest days, we occasionally talked about our childhood together.

Once, while we were reminiscing, Bhagavan asked me, 'Do you remember, Rangan, that day when I urinated on the idol of Karupama Swami? You threatened to tell my father about it. I begged you not to tell him because I knew my father would beat me for it.'

'I remember it very well,' I answered. 'Nowadays, when I remember it I feel that Karupama Swami must have felt as happy as he would if he had been given a bath of Ganges water.'

Bhagavan had been very boisterous as a child and he often seemed to be embarking on all kinds of mischief. I remember one of his pranks that got him into serious trouble. In Bhagavan's childhood the neighbouring house was occupied by a lawyer. This man once locked his house and went out of town on business. While he was away, Bhagavan managed to break in

and carry away some papers that he found in a cupboard. As a game, he pretended that the papers were advertisements for a forthcoming play. He walked up and down the road, imitating the people who gave out advertising leaflets. He gave the documents away to anyone who would take them. The papers were, in fact, important documents pertaining to a lawsuit that the lawyer was involved in. The lawyer returned after some time and came to know what had happened. He asked the children to return the papers, but many of them could not be recovered because they had been given away to strangers. The lawyer collected as many as he could and then reported the matter to Bhagavan's father.

Bhagavan's father got very angry and called out, 'Undress the boy! Shave his head completely and give him only a loincloth to wear! Don't give him any food!'

This is exactly what happened to Bhagavan in later life. When he came to Tiruvannamalai, he re-enacted the punishment: he shaved his head, threw away all his clothes except for a loincloth, and for some time he lived without food.

I had been initiated by the Swami of Sringeri[8] before I had even met Bhagavan.

When I spoke about this initiation to my brother, he said, 'I will take my initiation directly from Iswara [God]'.

Three years later my brother made his first visit to Arunachala to see Bhagavan. At first he looked steadily at Bhagavan as though he were trying to see the same Venkataraman he had known as a boy. Bhagavan returned his gaze without saying anything. Suddenly my brother prostrated before Bhagavan in obeisance. He stayed with Bhagavan for many days and after his return to Madurai he told me that Iswara himself had given him initiation. In the years that followed he paid frequent visits to Bhagavan and soon became an ardent devotee.

Many years later he was afflicted by tuberculosis so badly, he was not able to move around by himself. He engaged an assistant who helped him to come into Bhagavan's presence. My brother wanted to do *pradakshina* of Bhagavan, but this was not allowed because he was very weak. As he was leaving the ashram to go home, my brother started to cry. Bhagavan came to the door to see him off. There were tears in Bhagavan's eyes as well.

[8] Most likely, the Sankaracharya of Sringeri Math.

The man who had accompanied my brother told me, 'I did not believe it at first when your brother told me that Bhagavan had great love for him. But now I have seen with my own eyes how much Bhagavan loves him.'

My brother took *sannyasa* two years after he returned. He must have known about Bhagavan's views on the matter, but he went ahead anyway.

When his wife cried, thinking that he was about to abandon her, he reassured her by saying, 'Are you mad? Do you think that I would leave you alone? I will take you forty days after my own death.'

Everything happened as my brother said it would.

When this story was told to Bhagavan, he said, with great wonder, 'Who knows what God's purpose is in separating and joining people like this? Why does He hide and manifest His form?'

My father was the odd one in our family. He never had any devotion at all. He never visited temples nor did he ever go on a pilgrimage. My mother, on the other hand, was a great devotee. There was, however, one encouraging aspect to my father's atheism.

He used to get malarial fever frequently and during his fevers he would sometimes call out deliriously to me and say, 'See, son, look there. There is Lord Siva on his bull. *Arati* [sacred flame] is being given. Go and have his *darshan*.'

When I told Bhagavan about this, he responded by telling me a similar story.

'There was once a king who never worshipped any god. His queen, though, spent nearly all her time worshipping various gods and singing *bhajans* [devotional songs]. Because she was very unhappy that her husband had no religious inclinations, she used to pray to God to make her husband a devotee.

'One day, while *pujas* [ritual worship of deities] and *bhajans* were being conducted on a grand scale, the queen went to her bedroom and found that her husband was fast asleep there. Although there was no one else present, the sound of Rama *nam* [Rama's name] was resounding in the room. The queen searched intently for the source of the Rama *nam* sound and found it issuing forth from the king's heart.

'Immediately she sent for one of her ministers and told him, "God has granted my prayer. He has made my husband a great

devotee. Announce this to the people and let there be great festivity. Let there be *pujas, bhajans,* and music in all the temples of the kingdom tomorrow."

'The next day, hearing all the bustle, the king asked his minister what was going on. The minister told him about the order given by the queen. The king wondered how the queen had found out about his secret devotion. He asked her, and she told him about hearing the Rama *nam* sound in his room. The king was so upset that his secret had become a matter of public knowledge, he wanted to commit suicide. The queen then sought his forgiveness and made him desist from his attempt.

'It is better to keep devotion a secret,' concluded Bhagavan. He then added the comment, 'Unless a man annihilates his ego, he cannot get realisation. One must lose the feeling that one is performing actions.'

Bhagavan then illustrated this with another story about an ancient king.

'Once there was a powerful king. The king of the neighbouring country made plans to defeat him, but he never succeeded. For a long time the powerful king was proud of his prowess, but one day, unexpectedly, he invited the neighbouring king to come and see him, gave him his entire kingdom, and went into the forest to live there and do *tapas* [arduous spiritual penance].

'After many years the king started out on a journey. He fed himself by begging for food along the way. While he was travelling, he purposely went to visit his erstwhile kingdom. The people there recognised him as their former king, but he did not want them to show any respect to him. He wanted them to consider him only as a beggar. During his visit he went to beg at his old palace. The servants who worked there wanted to pay him their respects, but the king would not agree. He took a little food from them and went away.

'He was travelling around, living in this way, in an effort to annihilate his ego. While he was wandering around in this manner, the king of a country he was begging in died without an heir. In accordance with the local traditions, a caparisoned elephant was given a garland of flowers and turned loose. The person around whose neck the elephant placed the garland would be recognised as the new king of the country. The elephant chose the mendicant king and put the garland round his neck.

The king, initially, was not willing to take on the responsibility of running a new kingdom, but when the people of the country pressed him, he accepted the job.

'Meanwhile, the king he had handed over his original kingdom to also died without an heir. A delegation of people from that country came to him and begged him to be their king as well. The king accepted and reigned over the two kingdoms.

'But there was a difference in him now. In his first spell as king he had the feeling that he was ruling in a great way, and that he was a great man. His ego was thus very strong. When he returned after doing his *tapas*, he had the understanding that he was nothing, that God himself was ruling the country, and that he, the king was only an instrument in his hands. Because of this new attitude of the king, both countries became more prosperous than before.'

Because my brothers and I had received so much benefit from being in Bhagavan's presence, we made a point of encouraging other people to go to Tiruvannamalai and have Bhagavan's *darshan*. Our efforts were not always crowned with success. We once convinced a friend of ours that he should go and have Bhagavan's *darshan*.

He came back and told us, 'What a useless swami you sent me to! I thought that he would be engaged in divine worship, but on an *ekadasi* day he was actually cutting onions.'[9]

We tried to explain to him that we should not measure the greatness of *jnanis* [enlightened beings] with our yardstick and pointed out that there is no God for a *jnani* to worship. But the friend did not appreciate or understand us. He had expected a man from a brahmin family to exhibit holiness by at least adhering to the orthodox traditions of his caste. What to say? Bhagavan will not let himself be understood by the undeserving.

Bhagavan once ordered me to drop one of my own orthodox habits. One Tuesday at Skandashram, on a full-moon day, everyone in the ashram had his usual monthly shave.[10] Bhagavan

[9] For an orthodox brahmin, this was a twin offence. *Ekadasi*, the eleventh day of the lunar month, is generally regarded as a fast day, and orthodox brahmins do not eat onions at all.

[10] There is a tradition that *sadhus*, people who have given up family life in order to devote all their time to pursuing spiritual goals, should shave their heads completely every full-moon day. Bhagavan himself followed

said that I should also have my head shaved. It is against the *sastras* [scriptures] for householders to be shaved on such a day. I told this to Bhagavan, but he ignored the rule and still made me shave my head.

My conviction that all people could benefit from having Bhagavan's *darshan* made me send many people to him, but my missionary activities were not approved of by Bhagavan.

On one of my visits Bhagavan told me, 'You and your brothers have broadcast the news that there is a Maharshi here. Some people believe you until they come here and see me sitting in a corner. Then they think, "Oh, is this the man?" They get disappointed and go away cursing you.'

I agreed with Bhagavan that many people were unable to recognise his greatness.

'Covered densely by the idea of "I" and "mine",' I said, 'people are in such a sad state that even after seeing Bhagavan they are not able to recognise him.'

Then I tried to justify my behaviour by saying, 'When we have found such a great *jnani*, how can we keep quiet? We feel obliged to ask others to share in our joy.'

To emphasise the point I sang a Tamil verse by Thayumanavar that contained the same idea:

> When food is located, even crows cannot keep silent. They call their fellow birds to share it. But we have found limitless joy. It is simply overflowing. Come, men! Come and partake of it!

Bhagavan still seemed to be a little put out by my missionary activities because he responded by saying, 'Nowadays, even crows have stopped calling their fellow birds'.

On one occasion my brother-in-law, who was also a great devotee of Bhagavan, brought one of his friends to Tiruvannamalai. He had told him about Bhagavan's greatness and had convinced him to pay a visit.

While he was talking with this friend of the family, Bhagavan extolled the virtue of Arunachala and remarked, 'The important point is, Iswara manifested himself here in a human form'.[11]

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this practice till the end of his life, as did many of the *sadhus* who lived with him. In the period that Rangan is writing about, apart from Bhagavan's mother, all the residents of Skandashram were male *sadhus*.

[11] The traditional belief of Arunachala devotees is that Siva manifests

The gentleman asked, very eagerly, 'Where? Where?'

Bhagavan told him, 'There is a huge banyan tree on this mountain that has very big leaves. Iswara sits under it.'

My brother-in-law tried to tell his friend off: 'You are a big fool because ignorance has masked your vision.'

Pointing at Bhagavan, he continued, 'You cannot see Iswara even when he is sitting right in front of you'.

Bhagavan did not approve of my brother-in-law's comment because he turned to him and said, angrily, 'Enough! Enough!'

Bhagavan liked to be treated as an ordinary man, not as a God. He did not want anyone to publicise the fact that he was a *jnani.*

Although he managed to maintain a facade of ordinariness in his dealings with the outside world, Bhagavan was able to see the spiritual worth of everyone who came to see him. Some people came to live in the ashram because they could get free food there. These people would stay close to the kitchen. Others would attach themselves to visitors and ask them for money. Some residents enjoyed themselves by instigating disputes among the ashramites. Bhagavan knew all this. He let everyone follow his own way, but at the same time he managed to keep them all attached to himself. He watched them all carefully and was always looking for an opportunity to change them and put them on the right path.

Bhagavan also liked to pretend that he had no powers. He once told me the following story with great approval.

'There was once a holy man who was visited by many people. He used to tell them they need not come to see him because he had no special powers. Seeing that his master did not like to be disturbed by visitors, a devotee took upon himself the job of stopping the crowds of visitors. He began to spread the news that the holy man had no powers at all. The holy man was very pleased when he heard what was happening. He felt that by saying he had no powers, his disciple was subtly praising him.

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there in three forms: as the mountain itself, as the *lingam* in the Arunachaleswara Temple, and as Arunagiri Yogi, an ascetic figure who lives under a banyan tree high up on the north face of the hill. Bhagavan himself found a leaf from this tree while he was wandering around the mountain, but he was deterred from locating its source when he was attacked by a swarm of hornets. He took this attack to be a sign that he should not continue with his search.

Some people desire money and some fame. This holy man desired neither.'

Although Bhagavan preferred to keep his exalted state a secret from the general public, he would occasionally show us glimpses of his power and knowledge. Once, for example, a devotee, who was sitting at a distance from Bhagavan, copying some Sanskrit verses, had a doubt about what he should write. Bhagavan, without even being asked, called over to him and cleared his doubt. All our minds were an open book to Bhagavan, but he rarely showed his knowledge so openly.

I witnessed another strange manifestation of Bhagavan's power on one of my visits to Skandashram. Two men came from a village and asked Bhagavan to give them *vibhuti* [sacred ash] with his own hand.

'*Vibhuti* is there,' he said, pointing at some. 'You can help yourself and take some away.'

The men pleaded with Bhagavan, begging him to hand it over with his own hand.

Bhagavan refused, saying, 'There is no difference between your hand and mine'.

The visitors were very disappointed and left the ashram without taking any *vibhuti*.

I followed them and asked, 'Why did you want the *vibhuti* from Bhagavan's own hand? Why were you so insistent?'

One of them told me, 'I used to have leprosy. When I came to see Bhagavan on a previous occasion, he gave me some *vibhuti* with his own hand. I applied it to my body and within a day there were no signs of the disease. This is my friend. He also has leprosy. That is why I asked Bhagavan to give *vibhuti* with his own hands.'

Bhagavan must have known that he had inadvertently cured the leper of his disease. He probably refused to hand over a second batch of *vibhuti* because he didn't want to acquire a reputation as a 'miracle man'.

I once heard Bhagavan make an interesting remark about *jnanis* and their powers.

'*Jnanis* are of two types – *siddhas and suddhas*.[12] *Siddhas* know

[12] A *siddha* could be translated as 'one who has attained', with the implication that the attainment includes both *jnana* and *siddhis* (supernatural powers), whereas a *suddha* could be translated as 'one who is absolutely pure'.

that they have extraordinary powers. *Suddhas* also have such powers but they do not even know that they possess them.'

I think that Bhagavan would have put himself in the category of '*suddha*'. Power flowed through him and manifested in many strange and inexplicable ways, but Bhagavan was never aware that he was doing any of the marvellous acts that were attributed to him by his devotees.

It is often said that only a *jnani* can recognise other *jnanis*. Bhagavan seemed to concur with this statement when he narrated an incident that had happened to him during his early years at Tiruvannamalai.

I had asked him, 'When was the first time you took food from a sudra [a member of the lowest caste]?' and he had replied that it had happened on his second day in Tiruvannamalai. This answer triggered off a memory of another early incident. He told me that while he was once sitting on the veranda of a choultry [guesthouse for pilgrims] in Tiruvannamalai, some *mahatmas* [great souls] had come along and thrust some food into his mouth. Bhagavan noticed that there were many sudras sitting nearby, but he could see that they thought that the *mahatmas* were just ordinary ascetics. On other occasions Bhagavan was more wary about admitting that he could tell who was or was not enlightened.

A devotee once asked him, 'Can one *jnani* recognise another *jnani*?'

Bhagavan countered by saying, 'What is there for a *jnani* to recognise? Is not everything one and the same to him?'

I then put in a query of my own, 'Do *jnanis* have dreams?'

'Just like the waking state,' replied Bhagavan.

I persisted with my enquiries: 'Then what sort of dreams do you get?'

'I dream of temples, holy bathing places and things like that,' answered Bhagavan.

Although Bhagavan never boasted about his own realisation, he would sometimes say that the *jnani* was in a very exalted state.

Once, while he was reading *The Ribhu Gita,* he looked up and remarked, 'The *trimurtis* [the three gods, Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva] stand before the *jnanis* with folded hands, saying, "I am at your service". The *trimutis* have the work of uplifting the world, but *jnanis* do not even have that responsibility.'

Bhagavan once gave us an example of the Gods serving *jnanis* when he told us about an encounter he had had on the hill. He had been wandering aimlessly on the mountain, without food, when an old woman brought some rice gruel in a pot and gave it to him.

Bhagavan, who could easily discern spiritual greatness in the most ordinary-looking people, told us, 'I thought that she must have been Mother Parvati herself'.

Bhagavan gave me some indication of the power of a *jnani* when he told me, 'The *jnani* can leave his body whenever he likes. When the time comes for the *jnani* to leave his body, Lord Yama [the Hindu god of death] comes and asks, standing at a distance, "Will you please come?" If the *jnani* says "No, not now," Lord Yama will have to leave without him.'

Bhagavan accepted that it was very beneficial for ordinary people to spend time in a *jnani's* company and presence. He referred to this obliquely when one of my relatives came and asked him many questions.

His last one was, 'The Theosophists say that a great soul is going to descend to the earth and that everyone must get ready to receive him. Do you know anything about this?'

'I do not know anything about it,' said Bhagavan. 'But it is strange that they wait for some great soul to descend without trying to know anything about the great souls who are on earth at present.'

Bhagavan sometimes said that Self-knowledge, that is, attaining the state of the *jnani*, is an easy thing because we are already the Self and consequently are already realised. At other times he would admit that attaining such a state is very difficult. To illustrate the latter attitude I can offer the following exchange as an example. A woman came and had Bhagavan's *darshan*.

When she was ready to leave, she asked him, 'Bhagavan, my mind is wandering in many directions. What shall I do?'

Bhagavan advised her, 'Let it go in only one direction'.

After she had left, I asked him, 'If that is possible, what more do we want? That is *jnana* itself, is it not?'

'Well, what am I to do or say?' asked Bhagavan. 'As soon as people come here they want to become *jnanis*. They think it is quite easy. They do not realise the difficulty in it.'

Bhagavan played many roles in the years he was among us: sometimes he would play the child and sometimes the stern

father; at times he would appear to be very scholarly, but at other times he would make out that he knew nothing at all. In none of these roles did he ever forget who he really was.

He used to say, 'If a man acts the role of a woman in a play, does he ever forget that he is a man? In the same way a *jnani* never forgets that he is the Self.'

When I visited Skandashram, Bhagavan used to wake me up at 3 a.m., before anyone else awoke, and take me to Pandava Tirtham. We used to swim in the tank there before dawn. One morning, when Bhagavan came to wake me up, he found Dikshitar, who usually slept next to me, poking around the floor, looking for something.

'You are searching for your *takli* aren't you?' asked Bhagavan.

Dikshitar got up and said with some surprise, 'Just now I had a dream that *Sravana Purnima*, the day on which everyone changes their sacred thread,[13] is approaching. I was searching for the *takli* to spin the thread when you came up to me and asked me about the same thing.'

Bhagavan's unexpected knowledge of this minor detail reminded me of a question I had asked him the previous day.

'Bhagavan,' I had asked, 'is it not true that *jnanis* know all the three aspects of time – the past, the present and the future?'

Bhagavan had answered, 'This is a small matter to them. They know all that happens in three states – dreaming, waking and deep sleep, and all the happenings of the world too. But whichever world appears to you, that world will appear to be true and real. God gave man so much knowledge, but he withheld from him knowledge of the future. The ordinary man does not know what is going to happen to him in one minute's time.'

I have already mentioned that Bhagavan could recognise spiritual greatness or maturity in the people around him. He could also discern it in some of the animals that came to visit him or live with him.

One day, for example, Bhagavan's mother asked him, 'Why does that dog always like to stay in your lap?'

[13] Brahmin men wear a loop of string, draped from the left shoulder to the right side of the waist, to indicate their caste. Once a year, on *Sravana Purnima*, the August full moon, they are given a new thread at a special ceremony. The *takli* is a small gadget that is used for converting cotton fibres into this thread.

Bhagavan turned to me and said, 'This dog is always in unwavering *samadhi*. A great soul has come in the form of a dog. Mother does not know this, so she asked that question in ignorance.'

Hearing this I thought, 'If a dog can learn how to go into *samadhi*, it should not be too difficult a feat for me'.

I asked Bhagavan, 'Why don't you teach me that *nirvikalpa samadhi*?'

'What good is it to you?' replied Bhagavan. 'You must be in *sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi*.[14] While living in the world, you must be unattached to the world. While seeing everything, you must be in the state of unseeing.'

A few years later Bhagavan told me a little about this dog.

'There used to be a dog here. She always slept in front of me. Even when she was awake, she would be immersed in *nirvikalpa samadhi*. When she got pregnant, the ashram authorities chased her away because they feared that she might deliver unwanted pups in the ashram. She went some distance up the hill and delivered the pups there. She used to suckle them on the hill and then come and lie down in front of me.'

Around this time, a friend of mine from Madurai, who was very orthodox, came to see Bhagavan. As he was sitting down to eat his meal, one of this dog's puppies came and sniffed his plate. My friend refused to eat the meal he had been served because he felt that the food had been contaminated by the puppy. Bhagavan smiled at his refusal and started to tell him a story from the life of Dattatreya, the famous Guru of ancient India.

'Once Dattatreya and one of his disciples went to see Dattatreya's Guru. On the way Dattatreya warned his disciple that his Guru might appear in any form. The Guru actually came in the form of a Muslim fakir. After Dattatreya and his disciple had prostrated, they all sat down to eat. The Guru took a slice of bread from his bag, dipped it in fresh dog's milk and gave it to Dattatreya. Dattatreya broke it into two pieces, kept one for

[14] *Nirvikalpa samadhi* is a trance-like state in which there is a temporary awareness of the Self, but no awareness of the body or the world. The *sahaja* (natural) *nirvikalpa samadhi* is, according to Bhagavan, the highest state. One who is in this state has a full and permanent awareness of the Self and is able to function normally in the world.

himself and gave the other to his disciple. The disciple, who could not overcome his feelings of disgust towards the dog's milk, did not eat his piece. He kept it for some time and then threw it away.

'A little later Dattatreya asked his disciple, "Have you eaten the bread?"

'The disciple told the truth. Dattatreya then took a piece of bread that his Guru was chewing and gave it to his disciple to eat.'

Bhagavan told this story to my friend and then asked him to eat the food from the plate touched by the dog. My friend ate it. I was not there when all this happened. Bhagavan's mother gave me all the details on my next visit.

There were other animals that recognised Bhagavan's inherent greatness.

Bhagavan once said to me, 'Do not think that Arunachala is a mere heap of rocks. Many holy people and yogis live in the caves here.'

This remark somehow reminded him of a very special animal that had been to see him. He told me that on one of his *jayanti* [birthday celebration] days a golden mongoose had come to Skandashram, visited all the rooms and gone away. Bhagavan thought that perhaps some great soul had come in that form to give him *darshan.*

Crows, dogs, monkeys, squirrels, sheep and many other animals came to see Bhagavan. Many of them instinctively recognised his benevolence and greatness, had his *darshan* and went away. It is the human being alone who uses his intelligence and thereby fails to recognise Bhagavan's greatness. When we look at Bhagavan through the distorting prism of our minds, we think that Bhagavan is some ordinary, insignificant person.

Monkeys frequently visited Skandashram to play in the trees and to visit Bhagavan. Once, when I had come from Madras for *darshan*, a whole tribe came to visit. One of the monkeys approached Bhagavan, sat in his lap and embraced him. The monkey looked like he was giggling. He also seemed to be saying something to Bhagavan.

Bhagavan remarked, 'The monkey is telling me that today he has been accepted as the king of the monkeys. Look at the monkeys sitting on the wall. That one is the queen, the first lady of the kingdom. Over there is the second, junior queen.'

Then, pointing out some of the others, he continued, 'The chief of his army is sitting there. All the others are his soldiers.'

There were nearly a hundred monkeys assembled there. In their joy and excitement they climbed the trees, broke many of the branches, jumped around and made a lot of noise.

Bhagavan stroked the monkey king's head and said, 'The lame boy has become a king today. He has come to give me the good news.'

Since some of the devotees did not know the story of Nondi, 'the lame boy', Bhagavan told us again for their benefit.

'This monkey was a boy when I was in Virupaksha Cave. One day the other monkeys bit him, inflicted many wounds on him and departed, leaving him behind. The poor boy came to me with all his wounds, so I looked after him till he recovered. Even then I knew that one day he would become the king. It has happened today. Usually monkeys do not accept a monkey that has been looked after by a human being, but this one was accepted back into the tribe after it had recovered.'

One day, when I arrived at the ashram, I found that Bhagavan was living on a diet of green-gram soup and rice. A man who was posing as the ashram manager had prescribed this diet for Bhagavan. To ensure that Bhagavan complied, he was rejecting all the other food offerings that had been sent. I was a little disappointed because I had brought some bananas from Madras to offer to Bhagavan. Since it seemed that he would not be allowed to eat the bananas, I asked him what I should do with them.

'Do exactly what you always do,' replied Bhagavan.

I served the fruit to Bhagavan while he was eating his meal. When the 'manager' saw me offer the food, he started quarrelling with me, saying that I was spoiling the dietary restrictions he had imposed on Bhagavan.

Bhagavan intervened and asked him, 'What is my ailment, and why am I on a diet?'

A man who had come from Madras joined in the quarrel.

Addressing Bhagavan he asked, 'For what price has this man purchased you?'

Bhagavan smiled and replied, jokingly, 'Rs 5,000'.

Then he added, 'The first time a person comes to see me, he stands respectfully at a distance and bows to me. On each succeeding day he will come a little closer. One day, when he

has gained enough self-confidence, he will pick up a stick and begin to order around all those who come to see me. He will shout at them, "Come this way! Go that way!" etc. On the day after that he will appoint himself manager of the ashram.'

Within a week this 'manager' was thrown out of the ashram by some of the devotees. I should mention that anyone could stay in the ashram in those days so long as they did the work that was assigned to them. If they didn't do the work, they had to leave.

It seemed strange to me that people who came to serve Bhagavan should occasionally become more arrogant and egotistical, rather than less. I once asked Bhagavan about this.

'How is it,' I asked, 'that the egos of some of your devotees, instead of becoming less and less, seem to grow more and more by their contact with you?'

Bhagavan replied, 'If the ego is to go away, it has to come out first from its hiding place. When water is put on the stove to be boiled, it must get heated, overflow and then evaporate.'

Bhagavan was often at the mercy of arrogant or misguided devotees because for a long time he insisted on accepting and consuming at least part of all the food offerings that were given to him. When Bhagavan was living in Skandashram, a devotee regularly used to give him balls of *ganja* [cannabis] leaves.

Bhagavan's mother once told me, 'On one occasion Bhagavan was given quite a lot of *ganja* to eat. If this had been served to any other person, it would surely have resulted in his death. Bhagavan sat up for the whole day with blood-red eyes.'

After hearing this I told the devotee not to give any more *ganja* to Bhagavan. I also asked Bhagavan not to accept it.

He responded by saying, 'What can I do? I must accept whatever devotees offer.'

While I was talking to him I noticed that Bhagavan's gums had receded very much.

'You are younger than I,' I said to him. 'Why are your teeth as bad as they are?'

Bhagavan answered, 'A person once gave me poison in order to test me. It did not kill me, but instead ate away all my gums.'

I sympathised with him by saying, 'When Lord Siva swallowed *halahala* [poison], Mother Parvati was there to take care of him. She advised Siva to keep the poison in his throat and not let it

go down into his stomach. You poor man! In your case you had no one like Parvati to advise you.'

On one of my visits to Skandashram I noticed Bhagavan's leg was bleeding. He had just had a bath and he was drying his body with a towel.

'What is that injury?' I asked with great concern.

Bhagavan had not noticed it before, so he replied, 'I don't know'.

'How can it be, Bhagavan, that you are not even aware that your leg is bleeding so much?'

I was surprised that Bhagavan could be so ignorant of such a major injury.

After considering all the possibilities, Bhagavan remarked, 'I think a coal from the incense burner must have fallen on my leg and caused a burn.'

I got some medicine and applied it to his leg with a new understanding of how much distance there is between Bhagavan and his body. This understanding was reinforced by another incident that took place on a day when Bhagavan and I were walking on the forest path round the mountain. At one point, I stepped on a thorn. When Bhagavan saw me lagging behind, he stopped, came back to where I was, and removed the thorn from my foot. A few yards later it was Bhagavan's turn to step on a big thorn. I ran up to him, lifted his foot and was astonished to see innumerable thorns sticking out of it. Some were old and some were new. I lifted his other foot and found that it had just as many thorns embedded in it.

'Which thorns will you remove?' asked Bhagavan with a laugh. 'The old ones or the new ones?'

Bhagavan then crushed the protruding thorn with the same foot it was embedded in and happily walked away, accompanied by me. What better proof is there that Bhagavan had nothing to do with his body? In retrospect, I think that Bhagavan intentionally let me see him behaving like this in order to make it clear that he had ceased to identify with his body.

On another day, when we were at Skandashram together, I felt Bhagavan's leg from heel to knee and commented, 'When our legs touched when we played games together in our childhood, yours used to feel like iron. Your skin used to be so rough, when it touched mine, it felt like I was being scratched by thorns. Now your skin is all changed. It is like velvet.'

Bhagavan commented, 'Yes my body is all changed. This is not the old body.'[15]

Although Bhagavan could walk about without noticing that thorns were sticking in his feet, his skin was still quite sensitive. I noticed this when some devotees, who were on a pilgrimage to Pandharpur, came to the ashram and ate a meal there. Just before they left, they went up to Bhagavan and embraced him. I took advantage of their activities to embrace him as well, but as I did so I noticed that the skin on Bhagavan's body had gone red.

'What is this?' I asked him. 'How did your skin get like this?'

Bhagavan replied, 'They embraced me just as they would embrace the idol in Pandharpur. There, the God is a stone, but here the body has skin. The nature of skin is to become red like this.'

I came to the conclusion that Bhagavan's body was so pure and delicate, any kind of violent handling would leave a mark.

Bhagavan was not unaware of body pains; he was just detached from them. In fact I think that it is likely that he experienced more pain than we did, for not only did he have many painful physical ailments, he also experienced pain when some people came near him. He once told me that when some people came to bow to him, he felt as though he was being physically beaten. I thought that such people must have been very great sinners to affect Bhagavan like this.

I used to pester Bhagavan with all kinds of spiritual questions. Sometimes he would answer patiently, but at other times he would give his standard answer: 'Find out who is asking the question.'

I got this reply when I once told him, 'Bhagavan! My mind is torn asunder with all sorts of doubts.'

'He who is without any doubts is the real you,' said Bhagavan. 'Find out who that "you" is, and concentrate on that.'

I rarely felt that I was making much progress, so I once asked Bhagavan, 'How many times will I have to be born to get *jnana*?'

[15] When Rangan told this story on other occasions he sometimes said that Bhagavan had said, 'This is not the old body. The old body was burned by *jnanagni* [the fire of *jnana*].'

Sadhu Om (personal conversation) told me that he had been given this version of the story by Rangan himself in the 1940s.

'There are no factors like time and distance,' answered Bhagavan. 'In one hour we dream that many days and years have passed by. Don't you see in a cinema film mere shadows being transformed into great seas, mountains and buildings. The world is not outside you. It happens within you, like in a cinema show. The small world that is in the mind appears as a big world outside.'

Because I had this nagging feeling that I was not making much headway in spiritual matters, I once complained, 'Bhagavan, your grace is not on me!'

Bhagavan replied, 'You are speaking like one who, standing shoulder deep in the flood waters of the Ganges, complains that he is thirsty and says that he wants water from a tap in Tanjavur[16] to be brought to quench his thirst.'

'What about Kailash and all the other worlds?' I asked him one day. 'Do they really exist?'

I got a very short answer to this one: 'All are the concoctions of *maya*.'

On another occasion, when I was feeling more confident about being the recipient of Bhagavan's grace, I informed him, 'As I am fortunate enough to have had Bhagavan's *darshan*, my *agami* and *sanchita* karmas have been burnt away like cotton. Only my *prarabdha* karma is left.'[17]

Bhagavan responded by saying, 'As long as the mind exists, *prarabdha* will do its work. But when the mind is destroyed, where is that *prarabdha* and whom does it affect?'[18]

Usually Bhagavan answered my queries very patiently, but

[16] The Ganges is in northern India. Tanjavur is more than a thousand miles to the south of it.

[17] Many Hindu schools of philosophy recognise a threefold division of karma:

1 *Sanchita* karma. The store of karmic debts accumulated from previous births.
2 *Prarabdha* karma. That part of one's *sanchita* karma that must be worked out in the present life.
3 *Agami* karma. New karma accumulated in the present lifetime that is carried forward into future lives.

[18] Many respected teachers of Vedanta have taught that at the moment of enlightenment *sanchita* and *agami* karma are destroyed, but that *prarabdha* karma remains. That is to say, the body of the enlightened being

on one occasion he remarked, 'You have many doubts. You always want me to clear your doubts. But some people come here, sit before me and silently grasp the sole thing to be known. Then, without saying anything, they go away.'

'What can I do, Bhagavan? If your son is a dud and a dunce, you have to speak to him as often as it is necessary to get information into his fat head.'

Bhagavan smiled but made no reply.

Bhagavan much preferred to sit in silence, without being bothered by questions, for that was his natural state.

He once remarked to me, 'I am where there is no word'.

'Then why do you talk?' I asked.

'Out of compassion,' he replied.

Bhagavan could show extraordinary patience when people came to talk to him. When he was living in Skandashram, a learned Malayali gentleman, who was also an adept in yoga, went there. He lectured for four hours.

Bhagavan listened patiently, but at the conclusion of his talk he remarked, 'You have said everything that you wanted to say. The goal of your yoga practice is to have some visions and hear some sounds. While these are happening, the mind will be dormant, but afterwards it will rise again. You must try to annihilate the mind. The annihilation of mind alone is *jnana*.'

The gentleman seemed to agree with him. 'Yes, yes. What you say is true.' Though he spoke like this, he took leave of Bhagavan and went away.

Bhagavan could turn the most mundane event into an opportunity for spiritual instruction. Once, for example, Ramaswami Pillai was searching for a key that he had lost. After some time he came into the hall and told Bhagavan about the missing key.

Bhagavan said to him, 'The key is where it always was. It is not lost. Only your memory is lost. *Atman* [the Self] is always everywhere, but due to *ajnana* [ignorance] we spend our time searching for it.'

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has to fulfil its allotted destiny up till the moment of its physical death. Bhagavan disagreed with this, saying that all the three types of karma are destroyed at the moment of liberation. By way of an example he would often say that when a man with three wives dies, all three become widows, not just two of them.

Bhagavan turned one of my own comments into a little *upadesa* [teaching] when I accompanied him on one of his trips to the top of Arunachala.

As we looked down I commented, 'From this height, all things, all creatures look alike.'

Bhagavan agreed and gave my statement a philosophical twist: 'Yes, as you go up, you will see that all things are alike.'

Later, while we were walking on the hill together, he pointed out one of the main differences between us: 'You always have a desire for something or other. I never desire anything.'

According to my horoscope, the year 1921 was destined to be an especially bad period in my life. Bhagavan told me many times that I should not leave him during this period. In saying this he also seemed to acknowledge that this period would be a potentially troublesome time for me. During this year, while I was staying at Skandashram, a friend of mine came to Bhagavan and asked me to accompany him to Madras.

I had planned to go, but Bhagavan told me, 'Put him on the train and come back here at once. Don't stay at any choultry [a guesthouse for pilgrims] in town. Even if it is very late at night, come straight here from the station.'

I followed his advice since Bhagavan had clearly spotted some hidden danger.

On another occasion, during this same period, I wanted to perform the new moon rites on my father's grave.

When I told Bhagavan about my desire, he showed me a photo of my father and said, 'Your father is here. You need not travel anywhere else for these ceremonies.'

On that particular day Bhagavan refused to give me permission to go anywhere.

He was not always so strict. On a few occasions during this period he would give me permission to go to Madras, but he would always tell me that I should come back as soon as I had finished my business there. At some point during the year, some of my friends decided to go and work in Singapore. They asked me if I would like to go with them. Because I was afraid of poverty, I agreed.

When I went to Bhagavan to get his permission, he heard my story and said, 'All right, we will see,' but he would not give me his permission to leave the ashram.

After several requests I finally persuaded him to allow me to

go to Madras and join my friends. On my arrival there I learnt that my friends, after seeking me in vain, had left for Singapore without me. By Bhagavan's grace, and by his determined physical intervention, I survived the year without experiencing any mishaps.

Bhagavan did not seem to have much faith in his own horoscope. Once, while I was at the ashram, Sri Ganapati Muni studied Bhagavan's horoscope and predicted that Bhagavan would go on a pilgrimage in the following month. On my next visit I asked Bhagavan if he had been on the predicted trip.

'He saw my horoscope and predicted my future,' said Bhagavan. 'But that horoscope does not apply to me now. I have had another birth.'

Thinking that he was referring to his Self-realisation, I asked, 'You attained enlightenment while you were still in Madurai, didn't you?'

He replied, 'When I was studying, the thought of Arunachala came into my mind unexpectedly. I felt that my whole body was burning. From that moment on I was in *samadhi*. Though I was playing and talking to you, I was in *samadhi*.'

Bhagavan's mother died in 1922. Soon after her *samadhi* [shrine] had been completed, Bhagavan came down from Skandashram and stayed nearby. Someone had erected a small, thatched shelter there for him to sit in.

I came to see Bhagavan during this period and found him sitting alone under the shade of the shelter. It was such a small construction, there was no room inside for another person. The space was not even sufficient to stretch out and sleep. Since no other visitors were coming to him at that time, I used to squeeze into this small space with Bhagavan and talk with him there. At night Bhagavan and I used to sleep under a big tree on the stone steps that led to Pali Tirtham. Bhagavan told me to put two bricks under my head for a pillow and to use my towel as an undersheet. Even with a towel underneath me, it was not possible to sleep comfortably there because the steps were uneven.

One night Bhagavan said, 'These steps are not level. Please go and call all the *sadhus* who are under the banyan tree.'

With the help of these mendicants Bhagavan and I lifted those big stones, put them straight and made the surfaces even. We started at eight o'clock at night and finished by midnight. When

we woke in the morning and saw our work in daylight, we noticed that the steps were better than any a mason could have built for us.

I stayed with Bhagavan for months together over a period of many years. During this time I spent many nights with him. I don't know if it has any special significance, but I should like to record that I never once saw him yawning or stretching his limbs to loosen up his body.

On one of my visits I mentioned to Bhagavan that I thought my family was getting unmanageably large.

'If you are afraid of having more children, you will get more,' said Bhagavan. Then, after a pause, he said, 'There are some more troubles coming up for you'.

I replied, 'My troubles were over as soon as I came to see you,' but Bhagavan's prediction soon turned out to be correct. In the next few years my family was afflicted by a string of disasters.

First, my son fell into an open well. He got a deep wound and was brought home bleeding heavily. That night he had a dream in which he saw a black form standing near him. Bhagavan appeared in the dream, took a stick and chased away the form. We took my son to the local hospital, but the doctors there gave us no hope. However, by Bhagavan's grace, my son survived and came home within a month. A little later my third daughter became mentally deranged after giving birth.

When I wrote to Bhagavan about it, the ashram replied on his behalf, 'There is no danger to Meenakshi. You need not worry.'

I applied the *vibhuti*, which came along with the letter, to Meenakshi's body, and she was soon cured. No other medication was used.

About a year later Meenakshi gave birth to a boy who had an enlarged liver. When the baby was brought to the ashram, Bhagavan personally fed him two oranges a day. The liver trouble of the child was cured without any other medicine. It was another victory for Bhagavan's grace and advice.

After this my family experienced more difficulties. My fifth daughter caught a fever and lost her memory. An application of Bhagavan's *vibhuti* brought her back to normal. Then her husband got tuberculosis. I wrote to Bhagavan about this problem and received a new consignment of *vibhuti* and *kumkum*

from the ashram. My son-in-law was cured, although in this case it took a few months.

The most serious problem occurred when my eldest daughter became mentally unbalanced and fell into a well. At the time she went missing, we had no idea what had happened to her. We searched the whole town for her before it occurred to us to look down the well. When we first inspected it, we could not see her body. It was only when my wife insisted that we make a thorough search that we looked more carefully and found her. We brought her up to the surface, but she was already dead. Seeing that there was no life in her, my wife immediately ran into the house and prayed before Bhagavan's photo.

'Bhagavan, if it is true that we are all safe and sound by your grace alone, may my daughter breathe again.'

After saying this, she applied *vibhuti* to the dead body. Almost at once our daughter started to breathe again.

I used to bring all my family to Bhagavan, and Bhagavan used to look after them all. When I brought one of my granddaughters, Mathuram, who was then 1½ years old, Bhagavan put her on his knee and played with her. He was saying 'Aha! Aha!' to her and after some time he succeeded in getting her to make the same noise. When he put her on the floor and sent her back to her mother, Chidambaram Swami, who was sitting nearby, said that Mathuram had just been initiated.[19]

In the 1940s my wife and I attended the *mandalabhishekam* festival in the ashram.[20] At the same time she was suffering from acute pain in the back.

The ashram doctor told us, 'I will give an injection but I am not sure if the problem can be cured'.

The doctor gave her the injection and then advised her to go and lie down. However, she decided to go and sit with Bhagavan instead. While she was sitting before him, she had some kind of fit and collapsed. We took her away and made her lie down in

[19] In one of the standard forms of initiation, the Guru passes on a mantra by speaking it in the disciple's ear. The disciple then goes away and repeats the mantra as his spiritual practice.

[20] This was probably the forty-eight-day cycle of *pujas* that followed the consecration of the Mother's Temple. A *mandala* is a period of forty-eight days and an *abhishekam* is a ceremonial ritual in which a deity is washed or anointed with various liquids.

a friend's house. She was so ill, many people in the ashram were afraid that she would die. Fortunately, she made a speedy recovery, so much so that she was able to come to the ashram the following morning.

Bhagavan asked me, 'How is Chellamma? I do not think she is in pain any more.'

As he was saying this, he waved his hands in the air. From then on, my wife never had that spinal pain again.

The family disasters continued when my second son was bitten by a snake. His vision became blurred and his body went blue. He had been bitten in a village where no medicine or antidote was available. We put him under Bhagavan's photo and hoped for the best.

Early the following morning he opened his eyes and said, 'Father, Bhagavan came to me and patted my leg'.

'Did he?' I said with great relief. 'Then you will live.'

On the following day I took him to a hospital in Madurai. The doctors there saw him and predicted that he would probably die. Even if he lived, they said, his leg would have to be amputated.

I wrote to Bhagavan immediately. In his reply[21] Bhagavan assured me that he would not leave those who had faith and belief in him. He added that the boy would soon become well. As Bhagavan had predicted, the boy soon became normal.

On one of my visits to Skandashram, Bhagavan had told me, 'I have attained what I have to attain. Now there is nothing more that I should achieve. I can live as I like.'

'Then shall I bring a girl and marry you off?' I said jokingly.

'All right, whatever you wish,' he answered.

When I came to attend this *mandalabhishekam* many years later, Bhagavan said to my wife, 'Rangan has asked me if he can marry off his daughter, and I have said "Yes". Then he asked me if he could perform the marriage here itself. I am afraid that he may bring your daughter and ask me to put the three knots round her neck myself. Why? Because thirty years ago he said

[21] All incoming letters were shown to Bhagavan, but he never answered any himself. If advice or help were needed, Bhagavan would sometimes tell one of the office staff what sort of answer to write. All the replies were drafted in the office, but Bhagavan would inspect them all before posting to ensure that his views had been accurately conveyed.

that he would marry me off. From that day on I am living in fear that he might suddenly bring some girl for me!'

I once went to Kumbakonam on some business. The Mahamakha festival, which is quite famous there, was approaching and thousands of devotees were entering the town. Two days prior to the festival, I went to Tiruvannamalai because I had a strong feeling that I should see Bhagavan.

'What is this?' enquired Bhagavan. 'While everyone else is going to Kumbakonam for the festival, you have come away from that place?'

I told him, 'I came because I know that the God here is greater than the God of the Mahamakha festival'.

Bhagavan made no reply. I stayed for a few days and then decided that it was time to leave. At the moment of parting I felt very disconsolate and began to cry.

Seeing this, Bhagavan said, 'You are imagining that you came from Kumbakonam and are now going to Madurai. You are where you always were, that is, in the same place. Now that you are with me, you are in a state of jubilation. But when you have reached the state of Self by yourself, you will realise that there is nothing special in me. You will know that you are also that Self.'

It was a common experience that people would feel joy, ecstasy or jubilation in Bhagavan's presence, and then lose it when they went away from him. Bhagavan knew, of course, that he had this effect on people. I remember one man in particular who had this problem. He used to come to Bhagavan, sing devotional songs with great fervour and dance to the tunes he was singing.

One day, after his departure, Bhagavan commented, 'He dances with joy when he comes here. But when he departs, he takes back the burden of sin that he temporarily lowered.'

On one of my visits to Bhagavan in the 1940s, I discovered that the manager of the ashram had gone back to his home town. He had asked a devotee there to give some letters of recommendation to the rich people of the area. Their purpose was to collect some subscriptions to build a temple over the Mother's *samadhi*. The devotee wrote letters to many wealthy people, especially to the Chettiars of Devakota. The manager put all these letters in a bag with his luggage. As he was eating his lunch in the devotee's house before starting on his journey,

his host received a letter from Tiruvannamalai saying that Bhagavan did not approve of the ashram manager collecting funds for the construction of the temple. The devotee, after reading the letter, secretly removed his own letters of recommendation from the manager's bag. The manager discovered the loss after he had finished his lunch. The devotee explained that he had taken the letters away because he had received information that Bhagavan did not approve of the manager's fund-raising activities. He showed the manager the letter he had received and told him that unless he got a letter from Bhagavan himself, asking him to give letters requesting subscriptions, he would not volunteer to help. The manager then wrote a letter to Bhagavan, seeking his permission to collect subscriptions. I was with Bhagavan when he received this letter.

After reading it, Bhagavan remarked, 'Some devotees are asking that I should write such a letter'.[22]

I tried to show a little sympathy for Bhagavan's 'business' problems.

'We come here, running away from mundane worldly matters in order to look for peace. But what do we find here? Even here there is no peace.'

Bhagavan smiled and told the story of Swaroopanananda. Perhaps he did this to tell me that peace could always be found in a *jnani's* presence.

'There was once a yogi called Swaroopanananda who had many disciples. Early in the morning the disciples went to a nearby stream for a bath. The brahmins of the town also used that stream to bathe in. The disciples boasted about the greatness of their master before these brahmins and showed them a poem they had composed in his honour. The brahmins read the poem and then complained that the metre of the poem could only be used to commemorate the feats of great warriors who had killed a thousand elephants in battle. The disciples claimed that the metre was appropriate and invited the brahmins to come and see how great their master was. The brahmins accepted the challenge and went along to see Swaroopanananda in order to

[22] Bhagavan did not approve of the manager's fund-raising activities. He told him on several occasions that he should not ask devotees for money to run or develop the ashram. In keeping with his usual policy, Bhagavan refused to write the letter.

test his strength. When they sat before him their minds became completely silent. Swaroopananda eventually asked then why they were sitting quietly there.

'One of them said, "Your disciples told us about your greatness. We came to see if what they said was true. After coming here and seeing you, we realise that you really do have the strength of a thousand elephants. How, otherwise, could you make all our minds quiet like this, and keep them quiet for so long?"'

A devotee who thought he had sinned against Bhagavan came to me one day and asked me how he could expiate the sin. I advised him to do *pradakshina*[23] around Bhagavan three times.

He followed my advice and then prostrated before Bhagavan saying, 'Bhagavan, please do not keep my mistake in your mind'.

'Where is my mind?' replied Bhagavan. 'If there is a mind I could keep or not keep something in it. I have no mind.'

My wife also once did a few *pradakshinas* around Bhagavan.

She had wanted to go around the hill with him, but I told her, 'Bhagavan has stopped going on *giri pradakshina* [walking around Arunachala]. It will not be fair on our part to give him trouble by asking him.'

After my wife had walked around Bhagavan, she told him that she had got the same reward that Lord Ganesh had obtained from walking around Siva.[24]

'This is the place where it happened,' said Bhagavan.

[23] To perform *pradakshina* is to walk clockwise round a sacred object or person. Although Bhagavan actively encouraged *pradakshina* of Arunachala, he often criticised devotees who wanted to do it to his person.

[24] Bhagavan gave up doing *pradakshina* of Arunachala in 1926. There is a famous mythological story in which Ganesh and Subramaniam, the sons of Siva, agree to race each other around the world. The prize, to be given by Siva himself, is in some versions a mango, but in others 'the fruit of Self-knowledge' or *jnana*. Subramanian ran all the way around the world, but Ganesh contented himself with walking once around Siva. Ganesh claimed the prize because he maintained that the whole world was contained within Siva. Siva accepted the explanation and awarded the prize to him.

Traditionally, the race started and finished at Mount Kailash, but the *Arunachala Mahatmyam,* the scripture that describes the mythology of Arunachala, says that the event took place at Arunachala. There are other versions or elaborations of this story, such as the one that Rangan is recalling here, which locate the main story in different places.

'Wasn't it at Palani?' I asked.

'No, that was on another occasion,' replied Bhagavan.

On one of my visits in the 1920s Bhagavan complained to me, 'See Rangan, till now I have been sitting on the floor. It seems that from now on they will not allow me to sit like that. They are getting a black ebony sofa from Madras. From now on I shall have to sit on it. Why should I not sit on the floor as I have always done? Why should I not sit like everyone else? I feel equally happy whether I sit under this tree or on a garbage heap, but these people will not let me do as I please. I am in a jail here, only the jailers are not in uniform.'

Bhagavan used to talk like this on many occasions. He did not at all like the sofa we all made him sit on.

Once, in an attempt to convince him, I said, 'Bhagavan, you have reached a state higher than all of us. So, to show our devotion, if we make you sit on a higher pedestal, it is quite proper that you sit on it.'

'I see,' he said, obviously not at all convinced.

Years later, some devotees tried to make Bhagavan sit on a chair in the dining room and eat his meals off a table. Prior to that, he had sat on the floor like everyone else. I arrived at the ashram from Madras shortly after this new arrangement had been put into operation.

When he saw me enter the dining room, Bhagavan called out to me, 'Do you see, Rangan, what they are doing to me now? They have ordered me to sit in a chair and eat my meal off this table.'

After making a few enquiries I discovered that this new arrangement had been made because devotees had noticed that Bhagavan was finding it difficult to squat on the floor and get up again.

When I found this out, I went up to him and said, 'Do you ever ask for anything? You do not want anything. We must therefore look after your comfort.'

Bhagavan was not convinced. He would rather put up with any difficulty than be given special treatment.

I used to visit Bhagavan regularly when I worked in Madras. On one of my visits I missed the connecting train in Villupuram. I was very disappointed because the next train was not due for many hours. I told the stationmaster, who was a friend of mine, about my problem and he very kindly arranged for me to travel

on a goods train that was going through Tiruvannamalai. The train was not due to stop in Tiruvannamalai, but the driver slowed down so I could jump off. Unfortunately, as I was alighting from the train, I fell over and wounded myself. I started to limp towards the ashram, but the path was not clearly visible. I ended up scrambling through some bushes and thorn trees that added to my injuries. I arrived in the ashram in a very disreputable state.

When Bhagavan asked me where all my cuts and scratches had come from, I told him what had happened.

'Why all this haste?' he asked.

'In order to see you,' I replied.

Bhagavan made all my troubles worthwhile by saying, 'The yearning for *darshan* matters more than the *darshan* itself.'

Sivaprakasam Pillai

Sivaprakasam Pillai is best remembered for the role he played in getting Bhagavan to write down his teachings on self-enquiry. In 1902, when he first met him, Bhagavan was still remaining silent for most of the time. Sivaprakasam Pillai approached him and asked him questions about the nature of the 'I'. Bhagavan replied by writing his answers either in the sand with his finger or on a slate with chalk. Sivaprakasam Pillai made a note of all the answers and published them under the title Nan Yar? (Who am I?) *many years later in 1923 as an appendix* to Sri Ramana Charita Ahaval, *his verse biography of Bhagavan. He also included some of Bhagavan's answers in his devotional poems. In the mid-1920s Bhagavan edited and rewrote* Nan Yar? *in the form of an essay. It is this essay that now appears in his* Collected Works *under the title* Who am I?

Sivaprakasam Pillai also recorded some of his experiences with Bhagavan in verse form. These poems were liked and appreciated both by Bhagavan and by the Tamil-knowing devotees who visited him. Several of them were recited regularly in Bhagavan's presence as part of the daily parayana.

The Tamil parayana *(chanting of scriptural works) had started at Skandashram with the singing of* Aksharamanamalai *twice a day. Over the years more and more works were added until it became impossible to chant them all every day. A cycle was evolved in which each work would be recited every fifteen days. Four of Sivaprakasam Pillai's poems were included in this cycle:* Sri Ramanadeva Malai, Sri Ramana Pada Malai, Vinnappam, *and* Sri Ramana Sadguru Malai. *When these poems were first published in Tamil, Bhagavan himself translated into Tamil an English introduction to them that had been composed by Devaraja Mudaliar.*

Sivaprakasam Pillai was never a permanent resident of the ashram, but he visited Bhagavan regularly for more than forty years. Although he himself felt that he was not a good devotee, he was greatly admired both for his humility and his devotion. When Bhagavan was told about his death in 1948, he remarked,

'Sivaprakasam Sivaprakasamanar,' *which means 'Sivaprakasam has become the light of Siva'.*[1]

This chapter is divided into several sections. The first part, which is largely autobiographical, has been taken from a written submission Sivaprakasam Pillai made to a local court. Each of the remaining sections contains a complete or a partial translation of one of his poems.

Deposition[2]

I had Maharshi's *darshan* for the first time in 1902. I was then working as a clerk in the office of the Deputy Collector of the Tirukoilur Division. In that year the revenue settlement of the Tiruvannamalai Taluk [a *taluk* is a small administrative area] was conducted by the Deputy Collector of the Tirukoilur division. At that time the Tiruvannamalai Taluk was under the jurisdiction of the Tindivanam Sub-Collector.

When I went there for this revenue settlement, I heard that there was a young brahmin swami observing silence on the hill, so I went up to see him and had his *darshan*. It is this Brahmana Swami who is now known by the name Ramana Maharshi. That year I stayed in Tiruvannamalai for fifteen days – ten days for the revenue settlement and five more days for examining the accounts of the local Taluk Office.

I asked Brahmana Swami questions about self-enquiry, and he taught me the method of doing it. From then onwards, till 1910, I had Brahmana Swami's *darshan* once a year. In the period 1910 to 1917 I went to visit him four times a year, and every time I used to spend ten to fifteen days with him. From 1916 to 1922, although I visited him four times a year, I did not stay for more than three or four days each time.

In the year 1910 I resigned my job. After submitting my resignation, I went to Tiruvannamalai, stayed with the Maharshi for two weeks and then returned home.

[1] See verses 724-25 of *Sri Ramana Charita Ahaval.*

[2] In the 1930s a disgruntled devotee called Perumal Swami started a court case against Bhagavan and the ashram. One of the points at issue was the ownership of Skandashram. Sivaprakasam Pillai was asked to make a deposition to the court since he played a role in its construction. This account, which I have taken from one of his notebooks, also gives details of his association with Bhagavan.

From 1910 to 1916, whenever I stayed in Tiruvannamalai, I used to have as my lunch *prasad*[3] from the Arunachaleswara Temple. In the evenings I took my food at Virupaksha Cave. On my visits from 1917 to 1922 I took both my meals at Skandashram. In those days Muttammal, Mudaliar Patti and Akhilandamma were bringing food for Brahmana Swami. Maharshi's mother was also cooking for him at Skandashram. In 1922 and 1923, because of personal troubles and anxieties, I did not go to Tiruvannamalai. I only resumed my visits in the latter half of 1924. From then on, I visited Maharshi twice a year.

In 1902, when I had the Maharshi's *darshan* for the first time, he was living in Guhai Namasivaya Cave. On a subsequent visit I met him in the residence of Jada Swami. In those days only Palaniswami was serving him. From 1911 onwards Aiyaswami began to serve him as well, and in 1913, Perumal Swami came and joined them. All three of them were serving Maharshi with a sense of equality. Perumal Swami used to go out with Aiyaswami in the evening and return after collecting *bhiksha*[4] from town. Perumal Swami occasionally left on trips that lasted for a few months.

In those days there was a small thatched building a few hundred feet above Virupaksha Cave. A devotee called Kandaswami used to live there He had planted and grown several mango, coconut, and banana trees near his hut. Nearby was a rocky spring that the Maharshi occasionally used to bathe in. Whenever Maharshi went to take his bath there, he would stay for about two hours. It occurred to me that it would be good to have at least a larger thatched shed there as it would prove convenient for these brief stays of the Maharshi. I told Kandaswami about my idea. He agreed to build it and asked me for some financial assistance for the project. I gave him Rs 25. However, before he had a chance to complete the building, he left Tiruvannamalai and never returned.

[3] An offering to a temple deity or a Guru becomes *prasad* when it is returned to the donor or distributed to other devotees.

[4] *Bhiksha*, in this context, is the food collected by mendicant monks. Before Bhagavan's mother started a kitchen, some of Bhagavan's devotees would beg for food each day in Tiruvannamalai. Whatever they collected would be brought back to Virupaksha Cave and distributed equally to everyone present.

When Kandaswami left Tiruvannamalai, he gave the money collected for building the shed to Narayana Reddy. Perumal Swami, who was a friend of Kandaswami's, obtained this money from Narayana Reddy, collected some more funds and put up a shed with a galvanised iron roof at a cost of Rs 100. A few months later he dismantled this shed and constructed a stone building that was mortared with lime. I donated Rs 50 towards the cost of this building. Other devotees, including the people at Isanya Math,[5] also donated towards the cost. The building became known as Skandashram since Kandaswami had done most of the development work on the site.

Anugraham [Grace][6]

Glory to the name Ramana Maharshi!
Glory to your joy-giving beautiful form!
Glory to your pleasing sweet words!
Glory to your soothing acts, founded on beauty!
Glory to your gracious eyes that say 'Fear not'!
Glory to your spearing eyes that burn the limitless karma!
Glory to your victorious feet that destroy the anguish of minds caught in wrong ways!

Even though the people who approach you with restless and tired minds are sinners without devotion, like a mother who comforts her child on seeing its suffering, you melt with love and comfort their disconsolate minds with eyes full of compassion.

You become the father and mother of all those who approach you. You give them food, generate knowledge in them and in this way destroy their misery. Glory to the Lord who does this! Glory to he who abides as the embodiment of love! I take courage from the fact that, like the loving parents who listen with joy to

[5] A Hindu monastic institution located on the northeast side of Arunachala. The head of this *math* had a very high regard for Bhagavan.

[6] In this first poem Sivaprakasam Pillai gives an account of how he met Bhagavan and received instructions from him. He also describes some of the visions he had in Bhagavan's presence. As it is not subdivided into verses, I have translated it as a continuous prose work, omitting only one portion that contains some lengthy digressions on philosophy.

the prattle of their young ones, you will not get disgusted with the words uttered by me, an unlearned one, merely because of the many defects in them.

When I was studying at the English College, in my foolish mind arose the question, 'Who is this "I" who is wallowing in the world?' Despite searching in various good books and despite seeking you and asking you [this question], because of the excessive impurity in the mind of this dog-like one, I could not have a deep understanding of the answer to this question. [At that time], instead of attaching myself to the grace of the Lord, I was enjoying myself and wandering in all sorts of [wrong] ways. Because of my past karma I experienced many troubles and my mind was agitated. I [then] approached you, thinking that I would obtain your grace and redeem myself.

With kind words you said, 'The meaning of the word "I" is the one reality that exists as supreme bliss, as knowledge. It is indestructible, and although it is within this fleshy body, it is still different from it. If you desire to know this supreme essence, you must first get rid of the attachment that takes the body as "I" and then enquire "Who am I?"

'An intrepid warrior intent on capturing a fort destroys his enemies with a sword as they issue forth from the fort. Then he throws the weapon away and enters the fort. Similarly, while enquiring ["Who am I?"], even if innumerable *vasanas* [mental tendencies] arise and obstruct the Self, without getting frightened and without trying to fulfil the thoughts that arise, one should question, "To whom is this thought?" The answer will be "To me". When you then question yourself "Who am I?", the thought that arose will be destroyed. As thoughts keep rising, if they are destroyed in this fashion, the "I"-thought will finally be destroyed and the incomparable, supreme and exalted essence, "I", will be revealed.

'One who wants to get a pearl lying at the bottom of the sea will repeatedly dive into the sea, like a foolish woman who never gives up what she wants to get, and recover that pearl even if he is initially obstructed and forced out of the water. Similarly, while searching for the Self through the enquiry "Who am I?", foreign thoughts arise in crores[7] to obstruct, pull and force one out into the world. However, if one repeatedly dives within [like

[7] A crore is ten million.

the pearl diver searching for the pearl] one can know oneself. This Self-knowledge is liberation.'

You implanted all this in my mind. Further, through your power you subdued all my *karanas* [mind, intellect, senses etc.] and graciously taught the method of enquiry into my self, who am merged with this body in the form of mere consciousness.

While I was trying to practise with love the method given by you, a burning lust for beautiful women arose in my mind and troubled me very much. When I could not bear it any more, I wanted to get married [again]. As I did not have sufficient money, I was confused and troubled and tried to think of a way to get rid of my problem...

'There must be a God,' I thought. 'I will tell my problems to him.'

Thinking like this I wrote [the following words]: 'God, the performer of all deeds, Siva, Lord, I have no refuge other than you. Forgive my misdeeds and grant me your grace either by writing the answer to the questions written on this sheet of paper before dawn, or by appearing before me and answering them. If you do this, I will act on your advice. If you do not answer, the only alternative for me will be to seek the help of Brahmana Swami of Arunachala.'

I placed my request in a Vinayaka temple. My questions were:

1 What should I do in this world so that no suffering approaches and bothers me?
2 Can I marry the girl of my choice?
3 If not, why not?
4 If yes, how am I to get the necessary financial resources?

As I did not get a reply in any form, I approached your feet believing that you would help. I waited there [at Arunachala] for a few days [but received no direct answer. Although you were silent I felt that you were instructing me]: 'Not desiring anything, making the expanding mind subside, enquiring into the Self and abiding as the Self – this alone is the good path to attain what is beneficial.'

You demonstrated this to me by abiding in that state.

Thinking that it would be wrong to ask you my questions, such as how to get money, I was about to return home without

telling you of my difficulties. But then, my Father, one day, while I was sitting with others before you, a golden child issued forth from your head and then went back within it. You granted me this vision two or three times. Having convinced myself [by the vision] that there is a God, I wept with uncontrollable joy and told the other devotees nearby [what I had seen]. They all ridiculed me in various ways and said [that my vision] was due to the *ganja* [cannabis] I had taken.

The next evening [on 5th May 1913] I had another vision while sitting before you. Can this ignorant one describe it? All around you I saw an incomparable effulgence like the splendour of many full moons. Your divine body shone with the light of the sun, belittling the lustre of shining gold. Your beautiful eyes were shedding divine grace. In you was the majesty of the Lord of Lords, along with the power of giving bountifully. A little later I saw your whole body smeared with white, bright, sacred ash. My stone-like heart melted and became like water. I saw these visions, but those near me did not see them. I did not ask you about them, nor did you speak to me about them.

Two days later, while I was doing *japa* [verbal or mental repetition] of '*Om* Subramaniam' in your presence, your body dazzled like a superb crystal. I felt blissful but was afraid of losing such bliss [away from your presence. Subsequently,] you showed me your effulgent form many times in both the waking and dream states.

Is it possible to describe your supreme grace? I am a sinner who has committed all the sins that make all good people shudder: lust, anger, drinking, taking meat and uttering lies. In every way I deserve to be condemned and thrown away. Please subdue me so that I do not fall into wrong ways again. May I hold on to your beautiful feet and thus redeem myself. Please grant me this blessing.

Sri Ramanadeva Malai[8]

1 Ramanadeva! Sitting under the shade of your twin feet,
I do not control my mind. I do not know the way of

[8] In many of his works Sivaprakasam Pillai laments over his lack of devotion and his inability to follow Bhagavan's teachings.

A devotee once asked Bhagavan about this, saying, 'Sivaprakasam Pillai, who is such a good man, such an ardent devotee, and a longstanding

singing your divine glories with devotion. I do not melt away when meditating on your golden body, smeared with white *vibhuti*, the colour of the moon.

2 From dawn to dusk I spend my days in vain talks. Not even for a moment do I think 'Who am I?' My Lord, you have told me, 'If you speak one word, it will multiply into many words'. Ramanadeva, I am only pretending to be your devotee and not conducting myself as one.

3 I am a sinner who wastes most of his time listening to others' misdeeds and talking about them. I have many defects myself, but if others mention them my mind boils with rage. Thinking that there is no harm in it, I do not hesitate to utter small lies. Ramanadeva, is it not a high drama to fall at your feet [as if I am your devotee]?

4 Though I have become old and have suffered from various diseases, I have not destroyed the desire for women. The ghost of my mind desires to see their beautiful faces, to converse with them and to listen to their honey-like speech. Even though I give advice [to the mind], it does not subside but wanders after them. Ramanadeva, when will this delusion end and my mind become firm?

5 Though I have not forgotten your command to keep away from others' affairs, I am getting immersed in them instead of turning my mind towards the Self.

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disciple, has written a poem saying that Sri Bhagavan's instructions could not be carried out by him effectively in practice. What can be the lot of others then?'

Sri Bhagavan replied, 'Sri Acharya [Adi Sankaracharya] also says similar things when he composes songs in praise of any deity. How else can they praise God?' (*Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 630.)

When reading all the verses that follow, it should be remembered that there is a long tradition of Tamil devotional poetry in which the authors first deliberately belittle themselves, listing all their sins, and then plead for God's grace and forgiveness. Bhagavan's own poem, *Aksharamanamalai*, which was mostly written from the standpoint of a devotee, contains elements of this tradition.

The title of this poem translates as 'A Garland for Sri Ramanadeva'. Ramanadeva can mean 'Ramana the God', 'Ramana the Great One' or 'Ramana the Shining One'.

Ramanadeva, though I am the worst sinner and disobey your injunctions, it is your duty to stop me [from going astray] and to put me, who belong to you, on the right path.

6 As a result of discussing and enquiring about politics, the five great sins[9] and other events that take place in the world, I worry unnecessarily. By doing this I am only expanding my mind. I am not controlling it even slightly. Ramanadeva, when the Creator himself looks after the world, what is the use of worrying about it?

7 Ramanadeva! Since the intellect that determines right and wrong is bestowed on people by the grace of the Lord, the deeds of both the mighty and the weak are his alone. Since it is the activity of the Lord that brings about an appropriate consequence for each act that people perform, how does it matter [to me] if people perform good or bad deeds?[10]

8 I have implanted firmly within myself [the knowledge] that you are my Lord and I am your slave. I pass my time with the faith that you will stop me and correct me even if I go badly astray. Kindly bestow your grace [on me] to introvert my mind. Ramanadeva, whether it be pain or pleasure, grant me whatever you will.

9 In no way have you ever directed me, like a slave, to do this or that. And yet, within my mind you have revealed that you alone are my Lord [and master]. Ramanadeva,

[9] The five great sins are lust, anger, stealing, killing and intoxication.

[10] Bhagavan sometimes said that it was Iswara, or God, who allocates *prarabdha* karma (the actions that one is destined to perform in one's life) to each person, and that our only choice is to decide whether or not we identify with the body that is going through its preordained activities. He also maintained that we experience the consequences of karma through the ordinance or *sakti* (power) of Iswara. See *Upadesa Saram* verse one and Bhagavan's commentary on it in *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, letter 57, dated 11th August 1946.

Sivaprakasam Pillai put one of Bhagavan's quotations on this subject in verse five of *Irangal,* one of his unpublished poems: '"We have somehow become embodied. Whatever good and bad has been ordained to come, it will certainly come. It will not remain without coming. There is only one way to be free from suffering. That is to turn the mind within." So said Ramana.'

believing that you have accepted me as your devotee, I now remain free from anxiety and anguish.

10 Ramanadeva! Although you have never stated overtly that you have accepted me as your slave, when you heard about this fool's troubles, you affectionately consoled me. Furthermore, through your grace you soothed me by showing [me in a vision] your glorious form, and through some other deed, which should not be revealed, you indicated your attitude towards me.[1]

11 You know that my qualities and character are poor. You also know that among the ignorant, full of defects, I am the worst. You know that I have not attained perfection in any of the four *sadhanas* that are meant for the eradication of bad qualities. Though you knew all this, you still sought me and took possession of me. Ramanadeva, how can I explain this wonder?[12]

12 A father with incomparable love will melt the heart of his sinful son by his kind words, by rendering help and through genuine love. In these ways he will bring him back to the right path. In this same way you are melting my darkened heart. Ramanadeva, how great this is!

13 On the very first day I prayed to you, you stole my heart. But even then you did not make my mind stay firmly at your holy feet. It runs and wanders repeatedly before returning to you. It does not stay there firmly even for a brief period. Ramanadeva, when will you keep my mind firmly at your feet?

14 Though I did not have purity of mind, free from darkness, through your grace you took over this lowly one. You gave me your leftover food as *prasad*, even though I did not deserve it. I took it with great devotion, but I have

[11] According to a note by the author, the 'other deed' was a 'pointed statement' that convinced him that Bhagavan had accepted him as his slave.

[12] The four *sadhanas* (spiritual practices) are: (1) Discrimination (*viveka)* between the eternal and the ephemeral; (2) desirelessness (*vairagya)* towards the various enjoyments of this world; (3) intense yearning for liberation *(mumukshutva)*; (4) practice of the six virtues. These are (a) tranquility *(sama)* (b) restraint of the senses *(dama)* (c) withdrawal from distracting activities *(uparati)* (d) forbearance (*titiksha)* (e) faith *(sraddha)* (f) contemplation (*samadhi)*.

still not attained inner purity. Ramanadeva, it is extremely difficult to remove my inner dirt.[13]

15 Ramanadeva! You gave me a small bag containing *vibhuti* and asked me to keep it all the time. You also told m that giving up traditional disciplines is harmful. One day when I appeared before you without a tuft of hair, you told me that it would be good to grow it again.[14]

16 When you knew that I was committing a sinful act, in

[13] Some Tamil scriptural works speak very highly of the value of eating *ucchistam prasad*, food that is left on the Guru's plate after he has finished eating. Eating such *ucchistam* is supposed to bring great spiritual merit.

[14] At the time this was written, many orthodox Hindu men shaved off part of their hair, leaving only a tuft on the top or back of the head. Shaving off this tuft was a sign of physical renunciation. Bhagavan's comment indicated that Sivaprakasam Pillai should give up his idea of becoming a *sannyasin* and instead remain as a householder.

Sivaprakasam Pillai had a student called Manikkam Pillai who wrote a brief biography of his teacher after Bhagavan himself had appeared to him in a dream and encouraged him to undertake the work. This is his elaboration of this incident:

'One day, thinking of following [Bhagavan's] advice of obtaining food by begging, he had the idea that he should take *sannyasa*. To indicate this desire he shaved his head and went and stood before Bhagavan.

'Realising the intention behind this act, Bhagavan said, "It is good to grow a tuft of hair".

'Sivaprakasam Pillai then knew that Bhagavan did not approve of the move.

'Bhagavan told him, "Stay at home and do self-enquiry in all the spare time you have".

'Shortly afterwards the sister of Sivaprakasam Pillai's mother came to the ashram. He had been away from home for a long time, and his family was worried that he might decide to stay in the ashram. When she told Bhagavan that she had come to take her nephew home, Bhagavan approved of her actions.'

Sivaprakasam Pillai had by this time already resigned from his government job. Manikkam Pillai explains why:

'Another important reason for this move of his was that in Bhagavan's presence he used to get into a state in which all physical and mental movements were stilled completely. He experienced the same state in his office. Objective awareness would cease, his mind would automatically turn towards the Self, and all physical and mental movements would stop. As a result of all these events, he went to Arunachala and informed Bhagavan of his resignation.'

order to correct me, you looked at a dog that came to you with human excreta in its mouth and warned it either to give up the habit or to stay away from your presence. Ramanadeva, through that dog you implanted that command in me.[15]

17 One day you said that God will pardon only three sins, that he won't put up with any more. I realised the meaning of your statement to be that you will also tolerate a devotee's mistakes only three times. Even after hearing this, I have committed numerous sins. Ramanadeva, who is greater than this earth in patience, please bear with me and bestow your grace on me.[16]

Bhagavan wrote, quoting verse 341 of the *Tirukkural*: 'To whichever objects a person has ceased to be attached, he does not experience suffering from those objects.'

Sivaprakasam Pillai took this statement to be approval of his decision.

Freed from his obligations to work, he went back to his home village. Manikkam Pillai describes what happened next:

'He stayed alone in the outskirts of his village in a Vinayaka temple, or sometimes in the nearby woods. He persevered in constant *vichara* [self-enquiry]. During this period his state suddenly changed. He started laughing for no apparent reason, chanted *Tiruvachakam* and other hymns loudly, did *namaste* [formal obeisance] to all forms [of life], wore a long loincloth with a *vibhuti* bag tucked into it, smeared his entire body with *vibhuti*, carried a staff, forgot all caste restrictions and often frequented the cremation grounds and the areas inhabited by outcastes. During this period he visited the Murugan temple at Vayalur near Tiruchi, walking all the way. When he saw the deity, the spear in the god's hands appeared to move. Marvelling at this, he sang praises to the god with great devotion. Then, while returning, he accepted gruel and sour food from anyone who gave it. Because he had walked such a long distance, the cloth worn around his waist appeared to be like the ochre cloth of a *sannyasin*. After his return from Vayalur, he regained his normal state. He resumed his *vichara* and began to observe *mauna*. From then on he visited Bhagavan three to four times a year and stayed for about ten to fifteen days on each occasion.'

[15] In one of his other poems Sivaprakasam Pillai revealed that his 'sinful act' was his continuing desire for women.

[16] In an explanatory note the author moderates Bhagavan's views on forgiveness. He states that Bhagavan told him that it is rare for God to put up with more than three mistakes.

18 From the day I realised that you are my Lord, all the dangers and difficulties I encountered disappeared by your grace, like mist disappearing before the sun. You destroyed my intention to marry again and thus redeemed me. Ramanadeva, other than you, who could perform such a miracle?

19 Ramanadeva! You said that one method of destroying the ego is to cure the disease of hunger by begging for food from different houses. Instead of thinking deeply over the meaning of your statement and then, with your permission, taking up this method, I wasted my life.[17]

20 When I took refuge in you, you reassured me. When I was very worried because many obstacles were preventing me from performing a duty, you removed my anxiety through a pointed statement. Ramanadeva, please grant me a good mind that does not forget your beautiful feet either in misery or in happiness. What is the use of living if I do not know myself in this very life?[18]

21 Only you and I know the evil tendencies in my mind. All the others do not. By yourself you came and took over this sinner who is lacking in both devotion and earnestness. Ramanadeva, if I now beg you to grant me liberation, it is nothing but sheer foolishness.

22 O Munificent One! You yourself sought me and took me over. You are bearing all my burdens. But instead of staying in a firm state, this lowly creature thinks many thoughts all the time. Not being courageous enough to stop this restless mind, I wander behind it as its slave. Ramanadeva, one who does not make his Master's will his own – is he really a devotee?

23 I am a fool who has not destroyed the habit of lamenting over his past. I am a poor man who wonders expectantly whether a day will come on which I will attain purity of life. Consequently, I am ashamed to call myself one of your slaves. Ramanadeva, my desire for knowledge is laughable.

[17] Sivaprakasam Pillai never acted on this advice. In his note to this verse he says, 'I have not taken up this form of renunciation'.

[18] The author indicates in a note that the duty referred to was the performance of his daughter's marriage.

24 A true devotee believes that his *Sadguru's* blessed grace alone is his support. [Such a devotee] offers his *Sadguru* his body, his possessions and his soul. He casts all his burdens at the feet of the Master and walks on the way shown by the *Sadguru*. Ramanadeva, since this is so, can one like me be called a devotee?

25 Whatever comes comes through you; whatever disappears disappears because of you. Though I am aware of this truth, I am not remaining tranquil. Instead, my mind, jumping around as 'I', feels [alternately] happy and miserable. Even if I lose a trifling object, there is no limit to the misery my mind experiences. Ramanadeva, please shower your grace [on me] so that ideas of 'I' and 'mine' are rooted out completely.

26 Since that 'I' exists in the waking state but not in the sleep state, it is not the true 'I'. The ego's actions and all the actions performed by the body are yours alone. Ramanadeva, will this 'I' ever be destroyed without your supreme grace?

27 You said one day, 'A king is God and so is the servant who works under him'. If one ponders over this statement it would seem to mean that all the *jivas* are only Iswara. Their acts are his actions. Ramanadeva, grant me this sense of oneness.

28 I do not know how this delusion of saying, 'This is my native place; this is my property; these are my relatives,' has arisen. If I lose something that belongs to me, I become sad and miserable. Dividing [up the world] like this, experiencing happiness and misery – these are only the workings of the mind. This powerful mind is not under my control. Ramanadeva, when will it come under my sway?

29 Consciousness does not know its real nature because of the wonderful power of *maya*. The world and thoughts arise and subside in consciousness through this same wonderful power. Ramanadeva, since this indescribable *maya* is only a power residing in consciousness, everything is consciousness alone.

30 'Find out who you are.' This is the *upadesa* you give to everyone who approaches you. Ramanadeva, if people

question you further and further, and with humility, you eventually give them the appropriate reply: 'There exists a Supreme Power that actuates me, you and all others. Rest your mind at the feet of this mother.'[19]

31 'You are not your body. Realise your true nature by introverting the mind and by continuously enquiring into your real nature.' By these words you showed me the method of enquiry. Although I trained my mind in this way, it kept escaping without ever coming under my control. Ramanadeva, when I asked you the reason for this, you said that I did not have strength [of mind].

32 You said that I did not have the strength to introvert the mind. Is this fair? You have allowed me to wander in the world. You did not ask me to render any service [to you], nor did you ask me to observe other disciplines to control the mind. My body has also become weak. Ramanadeva, what is the way to get mental strength?

33 'To know oneself, one's own effort is the most important factor. The grace of the *Sadguru* is only an aid. There is no other way.' The *Vedas* and the *Agamas* declare this and you too tell your devotees the same thing. Ramanadeva, when even the self-effort is the fruit of the Guru's grace, is it wrong to say that the same grace could bestow the knowledge of one's own Self?[20]

[19] Sivaprakasam Pillai's annotation makes it clear that the term 'mother' is a synonym for God.

He wrote: 'You said that the one Supreme Power is responsible for all ignorance and external activity. From these words of yours it is clear that all is *Brahman* and all the activities are only the Lord's.'

[20] In the early Tamil editions of *Who am I?* Bhagavan gives the following answer to question nineteen: 'God and Guru can only show the way to attain liberation, but of their own accord cannot establish *jivas* in liberation.' This was presumably one of the answers that Sivaprakasam Pillai noted down in 1902. In later editions of the question-and-answer version of *Who am I?* the latter half of this sentence was modified to read, '... will not establish *jivas* in liberation'. When Bhagavan wrote his essay version of *Who am I?* he omitted this answer completely, so there must be some doubt as to whether he endorsed this statement that was attributed to him.

Sivaprakasam Pillai seemed to be under the impression that Bhagavan taught that grace is 'only an aid' to Self-realisation. It is my understanding

34 Unable to keep the body in one position, I keep fidgeting. The mind, without adhering to a single path, jumps out in all directions. O God, I am troubled very much because I fear that death is approaching me. Ramanadeva, please save me!

35 Unless I disassociate from the company of the wicked and seek the company of virtuous people, control over the mind cannot be attained. Though I know this fact, I do not know when I will seek the company of virtuous people. Ramanadeva, I am your son. Kindly lead my mind on the path of virtue and bestow your grace for a perfect life.

36 O my Lord, what can I say about the strength of my fate? Though your grace is raining on me, in the desert of my mind the fire of attachments is not yet extinguished. If I investigate how my destiny came into being, I will discover that it works through the 'I'-thought. Ramanadeva, who am I to eliminate the 'I' or the ego? Kindly destroy the ego yourself.

37 The Supreme Lord has assumed a human body as an act of grace and resides at Arunachala under the name of Ramana. Ramanadeva, if people in the world say that you too are a human being like us, that is the same as describing dense, rain-filled clouds as mere black smoke.[21]

38 Ramanadeva! You have incarnated in the world as a son of Sundaram Iyer and Azhagammal of Tiruchuzhi. At the age of sixteen you reached Tiruvannamalai, did severe penance for three years and then started radiating your grace for the welfare of the world.

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that Bhagavan taught that the grace of the Self or the Guru is essential since the mind cannot, by its own efforts, eliminate itself.

[21] A rain cloud and a smoke cloud may look similar, but only the rain cloud can give rain. A *jnani* may look like an ordinary man, but the ordinary man does not have the power to bestow the grace of the Self on devotees. In Tamil literature a rain cloud is a well-known example or metaphor that symbolises the capacity of God or the Guru to bestow grace.

39 I do not know clearly whether you are a God or a *jivanmukta* [liberated being]. You do not command anyone to do anything and you do not ask for anything. You are showering only grace on everyone. Though you know everything, you are acting in this world as if you know nothing. Ramanadeva, how beautiful is your *lila* [divine play] that all are deluded by your act!

40 O Supreme One! Like a father of a thousand sons who have no unity among themselves, you have no attachments. You act in so many different ways with your devotees. Those who do not have discrimination would say that you have attachments. Ramanadeva, he who knows the truth would never see partiality in your grace.[22]

41 So many people come for your *darshan*: wise ones, foolish ones, people from different religions and castes, differently dressed ones and people with differing natures. O Great *Siddha*! So many worldly activities are going on in your ashram every day, [but] you, Ramanadeva, are like the sun, [unaffected by any of them].

42 Is it possible for my one mouth to describe your glories? No one is capable of describing your glories unless you yourself reveal them through your grace. You have raised me up as your devotee. Somehow, please do not throw me away on account of my unworthiness. Ramanadeva, kindly make me submissive to you.

[22] In the presence of the sun, some flowers open while others remain closed. Since the sun impartially beams an equal amount of energy on all flowers, it is the maturity of the plant that finally determines the moment of blossoming, not the amount of energy it receives at any particular moment. Bhagavan sometimes used this analogy in describing the grace of the Guru. He would say that the Guru, like the sun, radiates his grace equally to all, without being affected or changed in any way by the objects (i.e. the devotees) his grace falls upon. One cannot therefore accuse the Guru of partiality merely because the mature devotees blossom in his presence while the immature ones do not.

The reference to Bhagavan being the sun in the next verse may be an allusion to this analogy.

Sri Ramanopadesam [Teachings of Sri Ramana][23]

1 The blemishless Sri Ramana said, 'Take either God or Guru as your Lord. Until you attain liberation, keep in your heart [the conviction] that you are his subject. Remain without desires and live according to his command.' O foolish mind, why do you forget this and get deluded?

2 'You must have a tuft of hair on your head; you must wear the sacred ash; you must observe the traditional practices; you must perform self-enquiry.' All these are Ramana's commands [to me]. O poor heart, keep these [instructions] within you, without forgetting them, till your final day.

3 'While staying at home, at all times when one is free from work, centre the mind that runs and wanders, hold it and train it in the incomparable enquiry "Who am I?"' The blemishless Ramana said this to me, but what am I, a dog, actually doing?[24]

4 'Always hold on to the thought of your real nature.' I forgot this teaching of yours and was possessed by evil *vasanas*. Having become fit only to die, this poor man is now suffering.

[23] This is one of Sivaprakasam Pillai's many unpublished poems. It seems that he originally intended it to have only nine verses. However, among his papers I found an envelope that contained a stray verse with the annotation, 'Add to *Sri Ramanopadesam*'. I have therefore included it as the tenth verse.

All the material that comes from an unpublished source has been taken from Sivaprakasam Pillai's notebooks that are stored in the Sri Ramanasramam Archives. They were donated by his biographer, Manikkam Pillai.

[24] Bhagavan's insistence that one should do self-enquiry at all times comes across very clearly in the following quotation that I have taken from an early, unpublished draft of *Who am I?*

'Destruction of mind alone is *tapas*. This alone is one's duty. One who is doing his own work will not pay attention to anyone else's work. One should never give room for swerving from the thought of the Self. However many duties one may have, at all the other times not meant for performing duties, one must perform only self-enquiry. While standing, sitting and taking food one can do *vichara*, can one not? If the mind happens to forget the enquiry "Who am I?" because of *vasanas*, when it remembers the enquiry, it should try not to lose hold of the enquiry again.'

5 The meaning of your statement, 'Always hold on to the thought of your real nature' is, 'I am not the body; my real nature is other than that which dies. Think constantly of what [your real nature] is.'

6 What is the meaning of the statement, 'Control the mind'? It means that even when the ego and the rest [of the mental functions] are born, without succumbing to any delusion, one should destroy them all completely like destroying a great enemy.

7 What is said to be the wandering mind is nothing but the power that thinks, 'I am the body; [its] wealth, house, parents, wife and children are mine; those who do good are friends, those who do evil are enemies.'

8 Even as the thought, 'I am this contemptible body' rises, destroy it by the thought, 'I am not this contemptible body'. This is the method of destroying the ego. When the ego destroys itself, it would then appear that whatever happens to this contemptible body is not to me.[25]

9 'Like the dog that eats human excreta, do not wander seeking women. If you associate with them, do not come and stand near me.' Sri Ramana said this [indirectly to me]. O mind, did you act according to his injunction? You yourself think deeply over this.[26]

10 'Give up enquiring about the senses, the mind, the intellect and the impure ego. Because this filthy body does not exist in deep sleep, and because the "I" exists always as the abiding consciousness, remove this delusion of "I am the body" and find out what this consciousness is by diving deep within and realising the truth.' This is the teaching of Ramana.[27]

[25] Sri Bhagavan taught that the ego cannot destroy itself. He maintained that when all the ego's *vasanas* have been extinguished, the power of the Self, acting through the grace of God or the Guru, consumes the ego and destroys it.

[26] Many of the verses reveal that Sivaprakasam Pillai felt acute guilt over his inability to carry out Bhagavan's instructions. His guilt appeared to stem from a conviction, expressed in one of his stray verses, that, 'Among the many crore sins, the worst is to disobey the command of the Guru'.

[27] The first line refers to the traditional Hindu practice of verbally

Sri Ramana Pada Malai [A Garland for Sri Ramana's Feet][28]

1 Blessed be the feet of the Master, who appeared as the embodiment of grace. Blessed be the knower of the *Vedas* whose feet remove ignorance and confer knowledge.

2 Blessed be the feet of God who steals the minds of those who see him. Blessed be the feet of the pure one who has neither likes nor dislikes.

3 Blessed be the feet of the Lord who granted a vision in the form of light. Blessed be the feet of him, the devotee, who has received the grace of the ancient Lord.[29]

4 Blessed be the feet of the embodiment of truth who realised the truth and renounced completely all [else]. Blessed be the feet of the strong one who shows the path of salvation as it really is.

5 Blessed be the feet of the knower who truly knows [everything] but does not show himself off as a knower. Blessed be the feet of the great one who teaches the way of highest devotion.

6 Blessed be the feet of the exalted one who grants freedom from fear to those who, [fearing the world,] take refuge in him. Blessed be the feet of the Lord who takes even poison as nectar.[30]

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negating identification with the body and the mind: 'I am not the body, I am not the senses,' etc. Though this approach is called 'self-enquiry' in many traditional texts, Bhagavan frequently criticised this approach as being too intellectual. He held that true and effective self-enquiry involves holding on to the 'I'-thought until it subsides into pure consciousness, its source.

[28] This poem, written sometime before 1923, is one of the earliest records of Bhagavan's oral teachings. The first few verses praise Bhagavan or describe his state, but most of the remainder include statements made by him that the author recorded in the first two decades of this century.

[29] The first sentence refers to a vision that the author had in Bhagavan's presence. The second sentence refers to Bhagavan, who realised the Self through the grace of the Lord.

[30] When Bhagavan lived on the hill, a jealous *sadhu* tried to poison him. Bhagavan knowingly ate the poison, but it had almost no effect on him. I spoke to Ramaswami Pillai about this incident since he was present on the day it happened. He told me that Bhagavan sat motionless, 'glowing like the Buddha'. Rangan also refers to this incident in his account. See p. 24.

7 Blessed be the feet of the Supreme One who drives away all sins. Blessed be the feet of the Father who lets no danger approach [his devotees].

8 Blessed be the feet of the Lord who does good even to those who do evil [to him]. Blessed be the feet of the Creator who melts even stone-like hearts.

9 Blessed be the feet of the munificent one who, like the sky that showers [rain], does not expect any reward. Blessed be the feet of the Lord whose speech is sweet as nectar.

10 Blessed be the feet of him who says, 'See who you are and let go of the non-Self'. Blessed be the feet of the peaceful one who says that misery will go if one becomes the Self.

11 Blessed be the feet of the one who grants the knowledge that 'I am not the body that is so dear [to me]'. Blessed be the feet of him who says, 'Cast all burdens on the Lord'.

12 Blessed be the feet of the one who says that the divine will bear any burden. Blessed be the feet of the sublime one who says, 'Stick to the path that is given [by the Guru]'.

13 Blessed be the feet of the one who says that all forms are God and all their activities are his. Blessed be the feet of the one who says that it is the ego, and nothing else, that causes all trouble.

14 Blessed be the feet of the one who says, 'That which rises as the "I" is the mind'. Blessed be the feet of the one who proclaims, 'The vision of *jnana* is the destruction of that [mind]'.

15 Blessed be the feet of the one who instructs, 'Be still without thinking anything'. Blessed be the feet of the one who says, 'Always keep your mind fixed in your Self'.

16 Blessed be the feet of the one who proclaims, 'Till you achieve abidance in the Self, do not slacken in self-enquiry'.[31]

17 Blessed be the feet of the one who says, 'The connection with the body will be destroyed by the "Who am I?" enquiry'.

[31] In this and many subsequent verses I have omitted the second 'Blessed be the feet...' because the phrase tends to obscure the relationship between the two related ideas that each verse contains.

18 Blessed be the feet of the one who says, 'Bliss will surge up more and more as the "I" dives deeper and deeper within'.

19 Blessed be the feet of the Lord, the dear one, who instructs, 'Offering the wandering mind to the Lord is the highest devotion'.

20 Blessed be the feet of the one who proclaims, 'Do not let go of the Lord within you even if he appears on the outside as something other than you'.

21 Blessed be the feet of the Lord who instructs, 'If the mind jumps out, stop it. This is offering the soul to the Lord.'

22 Blessed be the feet of the one who teaches, 'Crush all thoughts that arise. This indeed is the highly praised *vairagya* [non-attachment].'

23 Blessed be the feet of the one who says, 'The ways to control the mind are many. The best among them is self-enquiry.'

24 Blessed be the feet of the one who says, 'If controlled by other methods it [the mind] will revive due to the rising *vasanas*'.

25 Blessed be the feet of the *siddha* who explains, 'By mantra *japa* the mind will subside. *Japa* is *vichara sadhana.*'[32]

26 Blessed be the feet of the form that says, '[Contemplation on] form will make the mind one-pointed. Properly considered, [this method] is also a way.'

27 Blessed be the feet of the great one who teaches, 'If *prana* [breath] subsides, mind will also subside. [Hence,] *pranayama* [breath control] is also a means [to make the mind subside].'

28 Blessed be the feet of the one whose teaching is, 'Of all the *niyamas* [codes for self-discipline], the best is moderate eating. One word spoken leads to many.'[33]

29 Blessed be the feet of the one who teaches, 'Control of

[32] I do not know why Bhagavan is equating the practices of *vichara* (self-enquiry) and *japa* in this verse. He usually maintained that they were quite different *sadhanas*. By translating *sadhana* as 'means', one could make the sentence read, '*Japa* is a means to *vichara*', that is, a preliminary method, but this is far from being the most obvious reading of the text.

[33] When speaking of *niyamas* Bhagavan usually said that it would be

the mind is the gist of all books. Why [is] a book [needed] to see yourself?'[34]

30 Blessed be the feet of the one who says, 'Desire and the rest are the play of the atom [-like *vasanas*]. The cessation of desire is *jnana*.'[35]

31 Blessed be the feet of the liberated one who enjoins, 'Get rid of the distinction between man and woman. Marriage is a way of achieving it.'

32 Blessed be the feet of the noble one who explains, 'Giving to others is giving to oneself. If one knows this, who will refuse to give?'

33 Blessed be the feet of the exemplar of humility who says, 'The more one humbles oneself, the more one benefits. Get rid of hatred even towards the wicked.[36]

34 Blessed be the feet of the friend who says, 'If "I" rises, all

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enough if devotees moderated sleep and speech and took *sattvic* food in moderate quantities.

[34] In *Irangal,* verse two, Sivaprakasam Pillai wrote:

'He [Bhagavan] asked me, "What is your wish, tell me? Is it to enquire into rare or beautiful arts, or is it to do self-enquiry?" I told him, "I have no desire for books. I am interested only in enquiry." O mind, why do you forget your word and now desire books?'

In a comment on this exchange, Sivaprakasam Pillai wrote in one of his stray verses:

'If one wants to know oneself, there is no need to learn *sastras* [scriptures]. If you ask what should be done, then enquire firmly, "Who am I?" without uttering a word. Give up completely all thoughts of the non-Self and become tranquil.'

[35] 'Desire and the rest' is an abbreviation of the following list: *kama* (desire), *krodha* (anger), *loba* (miserliness), *moha* (delusion), *mada* (pride), *mathsarya* (jealousy).

The first line merely says, 'Desire and the rest are the play of atoms'. I have taken atoms (*anu*) to mean *vasanas* since Bhagavan himself used the word in this context in *Arunachala Ashtakam*, verse six.

[36] The two themes of this verse were expanded on by the author in two verses from *Irangal:*

> Sadhu Ramana made this poor man, who did not know anything, pray only to his feet. Am I fit to receive this good fortune granted by him? He told me to stick to the path of those who had given up

others will rise. If "I" subsides, [all others] will subside.'

35 Blessed be the feet of the friend who instructs, 'Don't go back on your word. Keep away from other's affairs.'

36 Blessed be the feet of the one who says, 'It is good to practise climbing [spiritually] by yourself. We won't lift you up.'[37]

37 Blessed be the feet of the yogi who says, 'It is dangerous to discard traditional rules of conduct. Ponder [over them] and understand their [inner] significance.'

38 Blessed be the feet of the silent one who teaches, 'Believe that the Lord rules over everything. Regard the world as a dream.'

39 Blessed be the feet of the Lord who says, 'It is fitting for the wife to listen to the words of the husband. [If she

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vain talk and disputation. 'Even if others speak ill [of you], do not get upset'. Ramana spoke to me in this way.

O mind, you keep proclaiming that Ramana is your ruler and that you are his slave. Ramana always acts with humility as though he is the slave of everyone. Although you have seen this for yourself, without subsiding with humility, you quarrel with everyone. Think that this amounts to quarrelling with the great Ramana, who has destroyed anger [in himself].

In one of his notebooks Sivaprakasam Pillai gave a striking example of Bhagavan himself exemplifying these teachings:

'One Balananda Swami asked Bhagavan to order Sri Palaniswami out of Virupaksha Cave. When Bhagavan did not do so, Balananda Swami spat on Bhagavan. Hearing about this later, Kambali Swami asked Sri Bhagavan, "What did you do at that time?" Sri Bhagavan replied, "I kept laughing. After all, this is only a body that has been spat out many times."'

Since Bhagavan had 'spat out' or severed the I-am-the-body idea, he had no reason to get angry when the body was abused in this way.

[37] The note to verse 33 of *Sri Ramanadeva Malai* on the respective roles of grace and effort can also be used to qualify this verse.

When Bhagavan spoke, he often used the plural pronoun 'we' instead of 'I'.

If the two sentences are read in the reverse order in Tamil (an acceptable procedure when interpreting Tamil poetry) the meaning becomes: 'If we lift you up, it is [then] good to practise climbing by yourself.' That is, once Bhagavan has given an initial instalment of grace, it is up to the devotee to make good use of it by practising *sadhana* himself.

does,] she will derive the same peace as the husband.'[38]

40 Blessed be the feet of the one who says, 'Fix the mind in the Self. Know that this alone is honouring the Guru's word.'

41 Blessed be the feet of the one who says, 'There is no need to give me anything. It is sufficient if [the feeling of] differences is removed.'

42 Blessed be the feet of the one who says, 'Formal respect is only for external show. When the husband and wife are in bed, where is all this [formal respect]?'[39]

43 Blessed be the feet of the Guru who takes even faults as merits. Blessed be the feet of the *jnani* who has adopted me, a dog-like one who has not done good *tapas*.

44 Blessed be the feet of the sweet one who, like the sun, makes the hearts of the devotees blossom. Blessed be the feet of the blemish-free one who lives in beautiful Arunachala.

45 Blessed be the feet of the spiritually wealthy one who arose in the holy place of Tiruchuzhi. Blessed be the feet

[38] Marriage here is used as a metaphor for the spiritual relationship between the Guru and his disciple. If the disciple listens to the words of the Guru and acts on them, he will attain the same peace as the Guru. In Tamil, the word for husband is the same as the word for 'the Lord'.

[39] This is an oblique reference to an analogy that Bhagavan occasionally used. The disciple may realise the Self and attain oneness with his Guru, but even then he still gives his Guru the usual outward show of courtesy and respect. Bhagavan compared the disciple's behaviour to that of a wife who publicly treats her husband with respect even though she has experienced sexual union with him. Bhagavan explained this analogy more fully in *Guru Vachaka Kovai,* verse 304:

'The habit of disciples of worshipping their Guru, who has taken them as his own, is, if pondered over, only observed as an outward formality, just like a wife's habit of outwardly observing proper reverence towards her husband while in company.'

In one of his unpublished versions of *Who am I?* Sivaprakasam Pillai gives some of Bhagavan's comments on the state of equality that exists between the Guru and the realised disciple:

'The Guru will be waiting for the disciple to get mature. When the disciple matures, the Guru will give him one glance. At that time all others, other than the disciple, will disappear as if burnt by fire. The Guru will keep such a matured disciple with him as his equal.'

of the handsome one who was born to the grace-filled Sundaram Iyer.

Sri Ramana Sadguru Malai [A Garland for Sri Ramana Sadguru]

1 Ramana *Sadguru*! The 'I' knows the body and the world that is made up of the five elements. The 'I' is aware of the objects of sense perception through the five sense organs. The 'I' thinks of the objects perceived by the five senses through the brain in the body.

2 When I was enjoying the world instead of finding out the truth by enquiring enthusiastically who this 'I' is, you appeared and revealed within my mind, 'You are not the body. You are of the form of Self-consciousness.' Then you said, 'If you have the desire to destroy the I-am-the-body ego, think unceasingly that you are not the body but the Self. If you think in this way, this thought will destroy the ego and will also finally disappear. Then you will shine as perfection.'[40]

3 Ramana *Sadguru*! When I was confused and perplexed like one who was frightened, having lost his way in a thick forest; [when I was confused and perplexed like one who was] suffering greatly from hunger, surrounded by wild animals of the forest, you appeared like one from the divine world, giving me food and showing me the way out of the forest. You removed my confusion and showed this one the path of *jnana*.

4 Ramana *Sadguru*, Supreme Self! Like a deer trapped in a net, not knowing the way to escape, I fell at your feet again, saying, 'Your feet alone are my refuge'. By answering, 'There is no need to get agitated,' you freed me from fear and saved me. In this way you became my Lord, my father and my mother.

[40] Sivaprakasam Pillai explained the relationship between thoughts and sense perceptions, and the way of destroying that relationship, in one of his stray verses:

'When thought associates with the senses, sense perceptions take place. If there is no association, sense perception does not occur. If thought merges in consciousness, the nature of consciousness is revealed. Thought, therefore, must be merged in consciousness.'

5 To all those who approach and praise you, you only say one thing: 'Do not say you are the body that is only a nest of worms. Know your true nature.' Ramana *Sadguru*, my Lord! If I happen to die before destroying my I-am-the-body distortion, it will be your responsibility to grant me some other good state.

6 'The body rises and subsides every day. The period in which it appears is the waking state. The period in which it subsides is the sleep state. But I [myself] do not rise and set. The wrong knowledge that one is the body that rises, subsides and finally dies will not go unless knowledge of the truth is attained.' Ramana *Sadguru*, this is what you said.

7 Ramana *Sadguru*, my father, the 'I'-thought is the root of the mind, known as the despicable *samsara*. You gave me the good *upadesa*, 'Destroy this "I"-thought [the mind] completely by enquiry'. But if I harm myself by seeking the world instead of seeking myself, then what will you, the Lord of my soul, do?

8 You revealed [the teaching], 'If you watch attentively where the "I"-thought first rises in the body, you will then realise it as the Heart. At that very instant destroy that "I"-thought there itself.' But, Ramana *Sadguru* of great *tapas*, instead [of doing this], I, a fool, am letting this 'I'-thought grow.

9 My mind does not subside in the Heart. Instead it rises as the 'I', escapes and wanders about with a great desire to perform karma. I do not know the reason for this. If it is due to my past karma, then when will this obstructing karma end? Ramana *Sadguru* of supreme grace! If I die, will I get your grace in my next birth?

10 Since all the thoughts of life, death and birth that rise in the mind have the 'I'-thought as their origin, one who attempts to destroy the 'I'-thought will not think of life, death, etc. But I am only pretending to be one who has a desire to destroy the 'I'-thought. My father, Ramana *Sadguru*, within me there is not the slightest earnestness.

11 Handsome Ramana *Sadguru*! Through your grace I realised that I am consciousness, not the body that dies. I should think of myself without losing this realisation.

To lament instead, 'My body has grown old. What will happen if I lose this state?' is a waste of time.

12 Whether this filthy body remains or dies, the afflictions that come to it and are experienced by it pertain only to this body and not really to me. I realised this when your grace revealed it to me. Peerless Ramana *Sadguru*! Though [I know this], it is a wonder that the desire to take care and look after my body [still] operates in my mind.

13 Ramana *Sadguru*! If I say, 'I am the body', then I can also say, 'Relatives, place of birth and country are mine'. If I am not the body, could I say all this? How can the mind of one who has destroyed the I-am-the-body thought attach to these [ideas]? Do not get angry with me by saying, 'He is a fool who does not get angry with his delusion and his attachment'.

14 You told me to cast my entire burden on the Lord and to think always and devoutly of his feet. To worry over the welfare of one's family and relatives – is this not inconsistent with your teachings? Please, Ramana *Sadguru*, grant me courage, patience and clarity.

15 Ramana *Sadguru*, the learned one! You have taught me that though we may think up crores of thoughts, nothing really fructifies without God's grace. [You have] therefore [taught me that] the best devotee is he who remains without thoughts. Even so, I have not taken your teaching firmly to heart and controlled my mind.

16 Ramana *Sadguru*, the clever one! I do not follow the supreme path that you, my rare Guru, have taught. I do not give up thinking of the world. You have made me mentally aware of the truth that I am not this perishable body, but you have not granted me actual experience of this truth. A kind master should control and correct his slave and not abandon him in disgust as an incorrigible brute.

17 If you continue in this way, leaving poor me to go my own way, how am I to be saved? Weakling that I am, I will not correct myself and you, my Lord and Master, will not correct me. Ramana *Sadguru*, have I any help except you either in this life or the next? What exactly is

your pleasure, and what do you intend to do with me? My Guru, is it right for you [to behave like this]?

18 Ramana *Sadguru*, Saviour, will you give me up? Are you not an ocean of compassion? [Sometimes I think that] out of disgust you will cease to care for me and give me up, saying, 'He did not worship me. He did not serve the Lord.' To worry like this is foolishness. Lord, if you give me up, who is there to save me and bestow grace on me?

19 You gave me a boon that my mind will gradually subside. This can be taken to mean that this [gradual subsidence] will extend into my next birth. Infinite Ramana *Sadguru*! As my doubt and fear does not befit me, please grant me the state of peace, wherein the mind is destroyed, before the body dies.

20 When a great king appears in the world and gladly offers help to all, the wise ones will approach him and better themselves, but the foolish ones won't. Similarly, Ramana *Sadguru*, while the wise devotees serve you, receive your grace and get redeemed, I, a foolish one, loiter like a dog in the world.

21 Ramana *Sadguru*, Lord, there is no shortfall in your grace. This is certain. There is no doubt at all about this. Without being near you and serving you, how can I destroy my association with my mind? It is only the strength of my fate that prevents me from getting this good fortune. Lord, when will this powerful karma be destroyed?

22 Peaceful Ramana *Sadguru*! Even after taking refuge in you, I did not give up my evil traits. O Pure One! I lament over the wrong deeds I commit. However, I am ashamed both to speak of these [deeds] before you and to crave your forgiveness. Consequently, I am in trouble, like an ant caught in the middle of a stick that has both its ends on fire.

23 Ramana *Sadguru*! Through your life you demonstrated that the knowledge which destroys ignorance cannot be attained unless one develops disgust for the body, bearing all the diseases that come to it. [You also demonstrated that the knowledge cannot be attained unless] one performs supreme *tapas*. However, to your devotees who

bow at your feet and question you, you say, '*Vichara* alone is enough. There is no need to renounce home, hearth, etc.' What is the meaning of this?[41]

24 Ramana *Sadguru* who resides in my heart! I have realised that the best way is not to beg you for this and that. When I was unable to bear my troubles, I asked you for various things. However, these [past begging requests] are enough. From now on, whatever troubles come, let me bear with them. Grant me the firmness of not asking you for anything.

25 Only one thing exists: Self-consciousness. The world, the soul and God are mere imagination. Those who know this will not be baffled even slightly. But those who do not, will believe differences to be real and they will be frightened by them. Among this latter category there is none more ignorant than I in this world. Ramana *Sadguru*, when will my mental agony come to an end?

26 When I think of my life, I feel ashamed. If I talk about it to others they will laugh, saying, 'Wonderful!' But you, who know [my life] even without my telling you, what good did you find in me? You came and took me over. Like transforming iron into gold, you accepted me in order to remove my defects. Ramana *Sadguru*! Please complete the task you have taken up.

Vinnappam [Petition or Appeal][42]

23 ... [Sri Ramana said,] 'Get rid of all the burdens which you imagine you are carrying by casting them all on the

[41] Bhagavan was once asked how he would answer the question asked in this verse.

He replied, 'The nature of the mind is determined by its former activities, its *samskaras*. People are able to continue to do all their work and yet pursue their self-enquiry and ultimately become realised souls. Janaka, Vasishta, Rama, Krishna and others like them are examples of this. Again, for some it would appear impossible for them to do this and they have to go to solitary places to become realised souls through self-enquiry.... Self-enquiry is essential for whomever it may be.' (*Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, volume two, letter no. 26, dated 7.12.47.)

[42] The first twenty-two verses of this poem summarise Sivaprakasam

Lord. Give up all other enquiries and practise only the enquiry "Who am I?" ceaselessly.'

24 'Remain without thinking. If thoughts rise, without trying to fulfil them, destroy them like enemies. As soon as a thought arises, question [yourself], "For whom is this thought?" [The answer] "For me" will appear. Then think "Who am I?" By thinking in this way, the thought that arose will die.'

25 'I am consciousness. What is my nature?' One must constantly think of this. When conducting such an enquiry, the obstacles that rise should be defeated by the above-mentioned wonderful weapon "Who am I?" Then the restless mind will become clear and liberation will be attained.' This is what you said. It is a very difficult path.

26 O God, you have assumed the name and form of Ramana and abide at the great Arunachala. You have somehow stolen the heart of this sinner who has many defects. You have implanted within the heart of this lowly one [the conviction] that there is no support for me other than your lotus feet. If I don't have your grace, how can I praise you?

27 Instead of putting up with all difficulties as your will, [instead of] destroying this troublesome ego, that rises as 'I', and remaining with the attitude, 'Your will is my will', I am going in the direction of my fire-like mind, growing the feeling of 'mine', paying greater attention to the body and becoming a slave of the senses. I spend my days like this.

28 The limitless thoughts, rising in many ways, have the 'I'-thought as their origin. You said, 'Unless all these thoughts subside, *jnana* will not arise'. Is it sufficient [merely] to have given out these gracious words? Ramanadeva, the liberated one, is it not your duty to bless me with *mauna* [silence]?

Pillai's own views on philosophical subjects such as suffering and creation. I have therefore not included them. I have begun the translation midway through verse twenty-three at a point where the author gives a summary of the answers Sri Bhagavan gave him on the subject of self-enquiry.

29 Only mind and ignorance prevent the real nature of consciousness from shining. Mind is only remembering and forgetting. Ignorance is sleep. If these two are destroyed, the nature of consciousness will be revealed, like the sun that shines when the clouds obscuring it move away. Ramana, praised by the universe, on what day will you destroy my mind and ignorance?

30 The mind that rises with name, form, senses, etc. does not rise alone. The mind that rises in the form of memory [still] remains one with consciousness. Both mind and the world rise and subside together simultaneously. The tendency to attach to a form as 'I' and to get immersed in ignorance arises because of association with this inert mind.

31 Existing within the *jivas* [individual beings], who are immersed in ignorance, you have ordained that they experience the three states [of waking, sleeping and dreaming]. The three states and the multifarious scenes that appear in the waking and dream states have as their basis the rising of the ego. Is the rising of the ego in *jivas* immersed in ignorance anything other than your act of grace?

32 Lord, you have made that consciousness, when it is immersed in ignorance, into *jivas*. You alone immersed the *jivas* in the ocean of *samsara* and gave them countless misery. You alone mature their ignorance and finally destroy it by bestowing grace on them. You alone give the *jivas* Sivahood and destroy their jivahood.

33 Without your grace the thoughts 'I' and 'mine' will not be destroyed. I do not know whether it is my past karma or something else that prevents me from staying near you. Ramanadeva, who remain hidden within me! You must console me by giving me your *darshan* and removing my fears. This indeed is my prayer.[43]

[43] In one of his stray verses, Sivaprakasam Pillai comes to the following conclusion about *darshan*:

Without realising what exactly Ramana *darshan* is,
Why are you pining for Ramana *darshan*?
Since Ramana's real nature is my own real nature,
Ramana *darshan* is only knowing myself.

34 You, full of powerful grace, are the Lord who rules the entire world. Yet when I wail and moan before you, asking, 'Lord, save me!' you remain indifferent like a deaf one. What kind of wonder is this? Is it befitting your grace? Since I have no other refuge other than your feet, please give me a word of encouragement.

35 Even if the body suffers from various diseases, let it suffer. Even if the limbs lose their function, let them. Even if the eyes lose their sight, let them. Even if death is to follow, let it. There is not the slightest use in my trying to prevent these occurring. Therefore, whatever happens, let it happen. I can only be, seeking your grace.

36 Whatever misery I experience, I must think that it is also your grace and bear with it. Whoever torments and tortures me, instead of hating them in anger, I must humble myself by considering [their actions] too to be your gracious act. Truly, *Sadguru*, this is what I pray to you for.

37 The great ones say that uttering lies is one of the five great sins. It is also said by everyone that in this world it is difficult to complete any task without lying. The truth of their statement cannot be denied. Tell me the way of living as an adherent of the truth in the midst of those wedded to falsehood.

38 Thinking countless thoughts, I became tired. The mind that thinks, rises as the false 'I'. Since the source [of the mind], which is consciousness, does not undergo any distortion, the [permanent] subsidence of the mind is the state of liberation. On what day will you cause my mind to subside? Will this poor one know? It is in your hands. I take refuge in your beautiful feet.

39 Mind, intellect and ego are different words referring to the same entity. It is the mind that has the sense of performing actions. In [the mind] arise memory, clarity, doubt and misunderstanding. O *Siddha*! The dancing, the subsidence and the destruction of this mind are your actions. Therefore, unless you grant me the boon that I never forget your feet, I will not be redeemed.

40 My real nature is consciousness, not the body. But since the real nature of everything is only the Self, the body

too is my real nature. God and all the *jivas* are also my form. Only my real nature exists. I have understood the meaning of this intellectually. Please grant me the direct realisation wherein everything exists as 'I'.

Akhilandamma

Akhilandamma was born in 1871 in a small village called Desur, located about fifty kilometres northeast of Tiruvannamalai. Following a tradition that was still prevalent at the time, she was 'married' at the age of five. Such child brides usually lived with their parents till they reached puberty, at which point they would move to their husband's home. However, since Akhilandamma's husband died when she was only seven years old, she spent all her childhood and youth at her parents' home. Under the social conditions that prevailed at the time, it was not possible for her to remarry, so when she grew up she decided to devote her life to serving sadhus. *Though she was primarily attracted to Ramana Maharshi, she also served Seshadri Swami and Vitthoba, an eccentric saint who lived in Polur, about thirty kilometres north of Tiruvannamalai.*

She first saw Bhagavan in 1896 while he was residing in the Arunachaleswara temple. On that occasion she saw the temple priest collecting the abhishekam *milk from the Amman shrine and giving it to Bhagavan. This* darshan *did not make a great impression on her. It was not until 1903, when she visited Sri Bhagavan on the hill, that she first felt his power. From 1903 onwards she was a regular visitor. She invariably came for Bhagavan's birthday celebration, for the Deepam festival and for Jnanasambandhar*[1] *Guru* puja. *She frequently came at other times during the year. On each visit she would bring food for Bhagavan and his devotees.*

When she stayed in her native village with her mother, many of Bhagavan's devotees used to come and stay at her house. With the object of serving such devotees, Akhilandamma and Masthan Swami (whom she introduced to Bhagavan) established a math *or centre there in 1914. Called Sri Ramanananda Mathalayam, it was the first 'Ramana Centre' to be established outside*

[1] Jnanasambandhar was a Tamil saint who lived in the sixth century. Since Akhilandamma felt that there was some connection between Bhagavan and this saint, she made a point of coming to Tiruvannamalai for this festival.

Tiruvannamalai. Many of Bhagavan's early devotees such as Kunju Swami, Ramaswami Pillai, Madhava Swami and Ramanatha Brahmachari were taken there to recuperate from various illnesses they had contracted in Tiruvannamalai.

Kunju Swami, one of her cured patients, made this comment in the introduction to her biography: 'I know that for the last forty years this lady has been engaging herself in serving food to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi and Mahan Seshadri Swami. Even from the days when Bhagavan was living at Skandashram, whenever any devotees there fell ill, it was her custom to take them to the math *in her village and look after them. She would only send them back after curing their illness.'*

In 1903 I visited Tiruvannamalai. While I was wandering near the mountain with the object of gathering flowers, I saw many people walking in a crowd towards Banyan Tree Cave, then known as Sadguru Swami Cave.

I enquired of them, 'Where are you going? What is so special there?'

One of the crowd told me, 'There is one Brahmana Swami there. He is only a small child but he sits motionless, without taking food or water.'

These words surprised me, but they also kindled in me a desire to see him. Perhaps it was through these brief words that the grace of Bhagavan ensnared me.

My first thought was, 'Can I take him something to eat? They say that he is Brahmana Swami [i.e. a brahmin swami]. If I take any kind of food he may not eat it.'

After thinking the matter over I bought a little sugar candy as a token offering and then went to see him.

What a sight he was! For the first time I saw the magnetic Lord who draws towards him the minds of those who see him. Even though he was unwashed and covered with dust, his holy body glowed like gold. On seeing this ascetic *sannyasi*, with a frame so lean that it exposed his bones, my mind melted and tears welled up within me. The young Lord then opened his eyes and graciously directed them towards me. I approached, placed the sugar candy near him, and prostrated. After Bhagavan had taken a piece and eaten it, a *sadhu* who was nearby returned some of it to me as *prasad*.

On seeing the condition of Bhagavan's body I was both struck

with awe and overcome with grief. These emotional reactions were so strong, I was unable to speak. While I was standing there, affected in this way, a brahmin aged about fifty came in with some sweets in his hand. Bhagavan smiled when he noticed him but the brahmin burst into tears. Unable to control his weeping, he eventually went outside to wipe his face.

I followed him and asked, 'Sir, why did Swami smile at you, and why are you crying?'

He replied, 'Madam, I am a relative of the Swami.[2] This Swami belongs to our place. He is the son of a great lawyer but he has come to this. My mind is unable to bear this fact and so I weep. He smiled at me because he knows who I am.'

I then asked some people who were standing there, 'Will Swami take some food if I bring it?'

I received a positive reply. From that time on I became a regular visitor. Each time I came I would bring fruits, place them before him and do *namaskaram*.

After this visit I returned to Desur. Bhagavan at that time was not living permanently in one place. He would mostly stay in Virupaksha Cave, but in the summer months he would move to one of the adjoining caves, [such as Mango Tree Cave or Sadguru Swami Cave]. When I came for *darshan* again, Bhagavan was sitting inside Virupaksha Cave, facing south. In those days Palaniswami was the fortunate *sadhu* who attended to Bhagavan's needs. He stayed with him night and day and served him his food. On this particular day he was also sitting in the cave, facing east.

I slowly made my way inside the cave, placed some milk near Bhagavan as an offering, and then came outside and stood in a shady place. On seeing Bhagavan again my mind had flowed towards him with uninterrupted, boundless love, but along with this emotion there had been a sort of inexpressible regard and fear. It is only natural for people to feel a sense of awe and reverence while they are near Bhagavan. It is also natural for the individual self to subside in his presence. There was a gracious power that prevailed in that holy place. It numbed the

[2] A footnote in the original text states that the brahmin may have been Bhagavan's paternal uncle, Nelliappa Iyer. It also states that the *sadhu* who gave Akhilandamma the *prasad* was probably Uthandi Nayinar, an attendant who had looked after Bhagavan in Gurumurtham.

mind, the power of speech and the body so effectively, visitors were automatically silenced. There were no rules about silence, but in that holy presence casual visitors who had come for *darshan* would automatically remain calm and quiet.

After I had waited outside for some time Palaniswami came out. There was some milk remaining in the vessel, and it was given to me as Bhagavan's *prasad*. I took it and returned home greatly delighted. From that day on this poor lady had the good fortune of getting Bhagavan's *prasad* for many years.

While Bhagavan was living in Virupaksha Cave, Kandaswami, a leading devotee who had great love for Bhagavan, selected a site higher up the hill for a new ashram. He took Bhagavan there and Bhagavan indicated his appreciation of the site. Kandaswami then began work on the new ashram. Single-handedly he cleared away the thorny shrubs, levelled the ground and planted coconut trees. Since that ashram was constructed in a spirit of service to Sri Ramana in a quiet manner and without any self-advertisement, it came to be called Skandashram in memory of Kandaswami.

Bhagavan often used to go from Virupaksha Cave to Skandashram during the period when the latter was being constructed. Because Palaniswami was very ill at that time, he was left behind in Virupaksha Cave. On one of these occasions I went there to serve food to Bhagavan. I placed the rice, *sambar* and *rasam* I had brought outside the cave. I then peeped inside, but Bhagavan was not to be seen. Palaniswami, who was lying by himself in the cave, called me inside. I went to him and told him that I had brought *bhiksha* [food offering] for Bhagavan.

He replied, 'Bhagavan has gone up to Skandashram, but he will return soon because I am not in good health. Bhagavan thinks that there is no one here to attend on me, so he will soon come back and see me.'

On hearing this I thought about Bhagavan, and in particular I thought about how he had made me do service to devotees. I realised that it was my duty to stay with Palaniswami. I quickly began to prepare hot water for him so that he could take a bath. Bhagavan returned from Skandashram just as I was finishing this job. I bowed to him and then stood aside. Bhagavan went straight to Palaniswami and enquired about his health.

Palaniswami merely replied, 'I will take my bath now'.

I then explained to Bhagavan that I had been preparing the

hot water in his absence, and that it was now ready.

Bhagavan indicated his pleasure by saying 'Very good!'

Turning to the others he said, 'Everyone is waiting hungrily. Let us eat food soon.'

Palaniswami then said, 'I also wish to have some solid food,' but Bhagavan told him, 'You must take only gruel'.

Palaniswami replied, 'The *rasam* prepared by Desuramma [the affectionate nickname of Akhilandamma] will be nice. I will dilute the rice with it and eat it.'

Then Palaniswami called me aside and said, 'Prepare *rasam* with pepper, chutney with horsegram and feed them to Bhagavan'.

I followed his instructions and served the food to all the people there except Palaniswami. Everyone, including Bhagavan, ate it.

For Palaniswami I merely gave cooked rice diluted with *rasam*. He ate it and seemed satisfied with it. However, he never ate again and about a week later he died. Perhaps it is Bhagavan's grace that he took his last food from the hands of this lady.[3]

[3] Palaniswami was a key figure in Bhagavan's early years at Arunachala. The following summary was written by Viswanatha Swami (*The Mountain Path* 1975, p. 205):

'Palaniswami was one of the earliest devotees of Bhagavan Ramana, noted for his non-attachment to anything worldly. When Bhagavan lived at Gurumurtam [in the 1890s] immersed in *samadhi* day and night, Palaniswami heard of him and went and attached himself to Bhagavan as an attendant. He served Bhagavan till the end of his stay at Virupaksha Cave on Arunachala for more than seventeen years.

'When Bhagavan went up to Skandashram, a newly built abode for him, higher up, Palaniswami chose to continue at the Virupaksha Cave itself for its solitude. Then Bhagavan used to visit him there off and on and found him growing weaker. When he fell ill and was unable to move out, Bhagavan began to visit him daily and help him in whatever way he could.

'One day he saw a peacock flying up from Virupaksha Cave to Skandashram in great excitement and it struck him that Palaniswami could be in a critical condition. At once Bhagavan went down to the cave and found his intuition correct. Palaniswami was in the throes of death, gasping for breath. Bhagavan sat near him with his right hand on his chest. Palaniswami's breath became soft and Bhagavan took off his hand when he felt a quivering within Palaniswami's chest. This, Bhagavan has said, is the sign of life becoming extinct in the body. But when Bhagavan took off his hand, at that very moment, Palaniswami's eyes opened. "I thought he

When Bhagavan first moved to Skandashram, no cooking was done there. Bhagavan and the devotees who were living there used to live on the food offerings that were brought every day. Whatever food came was equally divided and served to all. On one occasion during this period Kamakshi Ammal and myself went there with some food. On that day five or six heads of *maths* had unexpectedly come to Skandashram to have Bhagavan's *darshan*. Since we had not known about this in advance, we were not able to prepare food for them.

When it was time to eat, a devotee approached Bhagavan and said, 'They are all waiting. May we take food?'

Bhagavan, who knew that there was not enough food for everyone, replied, 'Let us wait a while'.

Sometime later a group of people unexpectedly came, bringing with them big vessels full of food. After saluting Bhagavan they offered the food to him. Bhagavan asked them to first serve the food to everyone who was present. Only then did he stand up to indicate that he was ready to eat.

In *Sri Ramana Gita* a devotee asks, 'How can one detect the existence of *jnana* in a person?'

Bhagavan's reply was, 'The existence of *jnana* is perceived by equality of vision that expresses itself in the form of total love towards all living beings'.

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would subside at the heart, but he escaped," Bhagavan remarked, adding, "That is said to be the sign of one going to higher states of spiritual experience, though not of immediate merger at the Heart."'

Bhagavan declared later that Palaniswami had taken birth in one of the higher *deva* worlds. This is the first recorded account of Bhagavan attempting to bring about Self-realisation in a dying devotee by putting his hand on the heart-centre in their final moments.

Having learned from this experience, Bhagavan successfully brought about the liberation of his mother in 1922 by using the same technique. Bhagavan described what happened when he put his right hand on his mother's chest and his left hand on her head:

'It was a struggle between mother and myself. Her accumulated tendencies of the past (*vasanas*) rose up again and again, and then and there got destroyed. Thus the process was over and peace reigned supreme. I felt the last quiver of the heart but did not take my hand off until it completely stopped. This time I was careful, thanks to my experience with Palaniswami, and saw that mother's *prana* (life) got completely merged at, the Heart.' (*The Mountain Path*, 1975, p. 206.)

Bhagavan himself is an example of this answer since his entire life is an illustration of this equality.

Bhagavan never accepted anything that was served to him alone and not to others. Even when medicine was given to him, he would take some and then have the remainder distributed to the devotees who were with him. Not only did he insist that all offerings should be shared, he also insisted that he should not be given more than anyone else. Nor would he let himself be given anything that was of a better quality than that which was given to devotees. Because of this, he would only accept a small quantity of food when devotees insisted on serving him first.

Whenever I cooked food, I would put most of it in a large vessel and put the remainder in a small pot for Bhagavan.

When I served Bhagavan from this small pot Bhagavan would sometimes say, 'You are serving too much to me! How will the remainder in this small pot be sufficient for everyone else?'

I would then have to reassure him by saying, 'I have brought a large quantity in another vessel. It will be quite sufficient to distribute a good amount to all.'

Only when Bhagavan had satisfied himself that this was correct would he relent and accept the offering.

Because everyone was aware of this principle, Bhagavan trusted us to distribute the food equally to all, after first giving him a small quantity. However, in later years, when Bhagavan became aware that this principle was not being rigidly adhered to, he refused to let anyone serve him first. Instead, he insisted that he be served last with whatever remained when all others present had been served. He would also refuse to start eating until all those who were eating with him had been served their food. All these practices were continued when Bhagavan moved to the new ashram at the foot of the hill.

In the Skandashram days the good fortune of taking food with Bhagavan was equally available to birds, animals and human devotees. Bhagavan never distinguished between his human and his animal devotees. The same compassion was available for all. At times it would seem as if his animal devotees were even more fortunate than his human ones. Lakshmi the cow, Valli the deer, Jackie the dog and the monkey called 'Nondi Payan' [the lame boy] are apt examples of this.

When Bhagavan first moved to Skandashram 'the lame boy' used to come and eat with us. Although he was given a separate

leaf plate, he usually preferred to help himself to rice from Bhagavan's own leaf. How lucky he was! None of the human devotees ever had the opportunity to share Bhagavan's meal like this.

On one occasion Bhagavan and the devotees were sitting in a line, waiting for the food to be served. 'The lame boy' was seated nearby. After serving Bhagavan, but before I could serve the others, 'the lame boy' took some handfuls of rice from Bhagavan's plate and ate them. Bhagavan only used to take a small quantity of rice, but he was quite happy to share that small amount with the monkey. When I placed some more rice on Bhagavan's leaf to replace the amount that the monkey had taken, the monkey grunted at me in a slightly aggressive manner.

Bhagavan at once turned to him and chided him, '*Adey*! *Adey*! She is one of our people.'

Then it kept quiet. What a perfect sense of equality resounds in those words!

One day I prepared some *murukkus* [a small crunchy deep-fried savoury made out of rice flour] for Bhagavan and took them to Skandashram. I did not tell him in advance that I was bringing them. On that same day some Nattukottai Chettiars also prepared *murukkus* and brought them. As they prostrated to Bhagavan and presented their offering I noticed that their *murukkus* were beautifully shaped and had a very good colour. I felt too embarrassed to give my offering at the same time because my *murukkus* were of such an inferior quality. I decided to wait until theirs had been distributed.

The *murukkus* brought by the Chettiars were first presented to Bhagavan. Bhagavan broke a small piece from one of them and then requested that the remainder be distributed to everyone. When this had been done I took my own *murukkus* and placed them before Bhagavan. Bhagavan took a whole *murukku* and ate it all. An attendant, Aiyaswami, then distributed the remainder. As he was passing in front of Bhagavan, Bhagavan leaned forward and took one more *murukku* from the plate.

While he was eating this second *murukku* he asked Masthan Swami, who was standing nearby, 'Masthan, what has been mixed in this?'[4]

[4] Masthan Swami was from the same village as Akhilandamma and he

Who can understand the reasons behind Bhagavan's actions, or the meanings that are conveyed in them? Bhagavan has no *sankalpa*.[5] He never decides how he should speak or what he should do. The speech and activities of Bhagavan are the automatic gracious *lilas* of the omnipresent Lord Himself. I learned from this incident that no one can discover or explain why Bhagavan's grace manifests in a particular way.

There were no ashram buildings and no rules and regulations when I first started to go to Bhagavan. Bhagavan would almost always be alone, either out in the open or inside the cave. Sometimes Palaniswami would be with him. Even then there were no restrictions for devotees. When I served Bhagavan food

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often visited Tiruvannamalai with her. He also used to help her with her cooking.

Masthan Swami was one of those rare devotees who experienced the Self on his first meeting with Bhagavan. He gave a brief description of what happened to him when he spoke to Kunju Swami:

'When I came to Bhagavan, he was seated like a rock outside Virupaksha Cave. [His unwavering gaze] was filled with grace, compassion and steady wisdom. I stood by his side. After giving me a look, he opened the gate of my Heart and I was also established in his state. I stood like that for eight hours, absolutely without fatigue, but filled with total absorption and peace. Bhagavan in those days used to open our Heart with a simple gracious look and it transformed us. There was no need for any questions since he made us, by his look, like himself.' (*The Mountain Path*, 1979, p. 154.)

When Masthan Swami died, Bhagavan gave instructions that he should be buried as a saint, using the rituals laid down in Tirumular's *Tirumantiram*. These same rules were followed when Bhagavan and his mother were interred. Masthan's *samadhi* shrine subsequently became something of a pilgrimage centre since many people reported that requests addressed to the *samadhi* were usually granted.

[5] *Sankalpa* can be translated as 'will' or 'intention'. Bhagavan, along with many other Masters, held that *jnanis* have no *sankalpa*. In this state, the Self makes the body behave in a particular way and makes it say whatever needs to be said, but there is no individual choice involved in any of these words or actions. Narayana Iyer once had a most illuminating exchange with Bhagavan on this topic, an exchange that gave a rare insight into the way that a *jnani's* power functions:

'One day when I was sitting by the side of Bhagavan I felt so miserable that I put the following question to him: "Is the *sankalpa* of the *jnani* not capable of warding off the destinies of the devotees?"

'Bhagavan smiled and said: "Does the *jnani* have a *sankalpa* at all? The

I would wait for him to finish and then take my own food from the same leaf. I continued with this practice for many years.

Bhagavan not only graciously permitted me to do this, at times he even helped me in the matter. During the later Skandashram days, when Bhagavan's mother, Chinnaswami and many other devotees lived with Bhagavan, they and Bhagavan never prevented me from enjoying this good fortune whenever I came. In later days, even when Sri Ramanasramam came up, this same opportunity was provided to me whenever I came.

After some time at Skandashram, Bhagavan's mother and other devotees began to do service by preparing food for Bhagavan and his devotees. Even when this practice started I continued to prepare food and bring it since I had been accustomed to do this right from the beginning of my time with Bhagavan. Echammal and Kamakshi Ammal, the daughter-in-law of Mudaliar Patti, also used to prepare and bring food even after the ashram acquired its own cooking facilities.

One day, during Bhagavan's years at Skandashram, Kamakshi Ammal came to me and said, 'Bhagavan and the devotees are going to the top of the hill tomorrow. They have asked us to prepare food in the morning and bring it to Skandashram.'

This was a joyful task for me. I got up very early the next morning, cooked the food and took it to Skandashram. Kamakshi Ammal and Echammal did the same.

Soon after our arrival Bhagavan started out from Skandashram with his devotees. Ascending the hill in the

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jivanmukta [liberated being] can have no *sankalpas* whatsoever. It is just impossible."

'I continued: "Then what is the fate of all us who pray to you to have grace on us and save us? Will we not be benefited or saved by sitting in front of you, or by coming to you?..."

'Bhagavan turned graciously to me and said: "...a person's bad karma will be considerably reduced while he is in the presence of a *jnani*. A *jnani* has no *sankalpas* but his *sannidhi* [presence] is the most powerful force. He need not have *sankalpa*, but his presiding presence, the most powerful force, can do wonders: save souls, give peace of mind, even give liberation to ripe souls. Your prayers are not answered by him but absorbed by his presence. His presence saves you, wards off the karma and gives you the boons as the case may be, [but] involuntarily. The *jnani* does save the devotees, but not by *sankalpa*, which is non-existent in him, only through his presiding presence, his *sannidhi*.'" (*The Mountain Path* 1968, p. 236.)

company of Bhagavan gave me immense happiness. On the way to the summit of Arunachala, roughly threequarters of the way up, there is a place called Seven Springs lying to the right of the path. It was so named because of the seven springs that issue from the rock there. A little above these springs some rocks have naturally formed themselves into the shape of a *mantapam*.[6] At the centre of the *mantapam* there is a big flat rock in such a position that it looks as if a seat has been deliberately put there. The rays of the sun do not penetrate this place. Even at noon a pleasant cool breeze can be felt there. When Bhagavan arrived at this place he informed us that he alone would stay there and that the rest of us should go to the top of the hill and return.

Masthan Swami and Perumal Swami insisted on staying in that place with Bhagavan, but the rest of us went to the summit, leaving all the prepared food behind us at Seven Springs. On the way down, because I was at the rear of the party and walking slowly, I lost my way. While I was wondering how I could ever reach Bhagavan, Bhagavan himself sent out a search party that repeatedly called out my name very loudly. Guided by the sound, I was able to find them. I reached Seven Springs feeling very happy that Bhagavan had bestowed so much grace and affection on me.

When Bhagavan's mother finally came to understand that her son was the Supreme Lord himself, she came to him and took refuge in him. After she came to live at Skandashram, Bhagavan not only looked after her bodily health, he also took the opportunity to raise her soul to a high spiritual level. Although Bhagavan was bringing about a spiritual ripening in all those who came into contact with him, merely by bestowing his gracious look on them, in his mother's case he accelerated this ripening process by being unusually strict with her. On many occasions he used to correct both his brother and his mother by chiding them with stern glances, by exhibiting anger or by ignoring them. His aim was to raise them to a more exalted spiritual plane. This happened many times but I will only mention three of the incidents since they all involved me.

[6] *Mantapams* are buildings that are often associated with Hindu temples. They have roofs and carved pillars, but generally one or more walls will be absent.

One day I went to Skandashram with fruit and milk. After saluting Bhagavan I stood to one side. Bhagavan looked at his mother who was nearby and asked her to take some. Bhagavan's mother was still reluctant at this time to abandon her orthodox habits. Consequently, she was unwilling to take even fruit and milk that had been brought by a non-brahmin.

Without giving a reason she replied to Bhagavan, 'You yourself eat'.

Bhagavan, who understood his mother's mind, said to her, 'All right, it is better that you go back to your house in Madurai'.

He then ate some of the fruit and milk and gave the remainder to Palaniswami. After taking a little, Palaniswami returned what remained to me as Bhagavan's *prasad*. By correcting her in this way whenever the opportunity arose, Bhagavan was causing the illusion of differentiation to be dispelled from his mother's mind.

On another occasion when Bhagavan, his mother and a few other devotees were seated in the ashram, I was moving among them doing some work. Though I was moving about very carefully, knowing I was in the presence of great people, I must have brushed past Bhagavan's mother's sari at one point. It had been hung out to dry in the area I had been working. Bhagavan turned playfully to his mother with an intention to mature her mind.

'Look! Look!' he said, 'Your sari that you hung up today has come into contact with Desuramma's body! Orthodoxy has gone! Go and soak it and take a bath.'[7]

Bhagavan's mother, obviously embarrassed by this, merely mumbled, 'No, no,' and after that she kept quiet.

There is another of my experiences that illustrates how strict Bhagavan was with his mother. I went to Skandashram one day to have his *darshan*.

[7] An orthodox brahmin of this era would live completely separate from other castes since any contact with them could result in physical or ritual pollution. As Bhagavan jokingly remarked, the only way to cleanse oneself from such 'pollution' would be to wash both the object that had been touched and one's own body. Many of the rules of ritual pollution have nothing to do with dirt or physical contamination as it is understood in the West. To give an extreme example: a priest whose relative has just died in a distant town would be in a state of pollution for several days, and as such, would not be permitted to perform any priestly duties for a prescribed number of days.

When I had bowed to Bhagavan and stood up, Bhagavan's mother enquired of me, 'What have you brought?'

I replied that I had cooked and brought some green leaves.

'What kind of green leaves?' she asked.

I replied, 'Leaves that are found on the mountain'.

Bhagavan's mother then said to me rather wistfully, 'Only you people know where such leaves are available. They are very tasty when they are cooked.'

From these words I inferred that she liked this particular kind of green leaf. On the same day I went up the hill and plucked some more leaves of the same kind. I then brought them to Skandashram and concealed them under some plants that were growing just outside the ashram. After hiding the leaves I went up to Bhagavan's mother and told her in a low voice that I had picked some leaves and concealed them near the gate. She was less discreet.

In a loud voice she said to Ramanatha Brahmachari, 'Ramanatha, Desuramma has brought some leaves. Take them and keep them.'

This instruction was heard by Bhagavan.

He looked at his mother and said sternly, 'It seems that you are in the habit of asking for various things from those who come here'.[8]

Feeling that my action had created trouble for Bhagavan's mother, I intervened before she could give a reply.

'No Bhagavan,' I said, 'mother did not ask. I myself brought them.'

To this Bhagavan said laughingly, 'Mother also habitually asks'.

The implications of this seemingly trivial incident are very profound. Anyone who tries to hide anything from Bhagavan is only deceiving himself. It is foolish to derive satisfaction from hiding something from Bhagavan. Bhagavan exposed such activities merely to purify our minds. On this occasion even though I spoke in a very low voice, it was the gracious power of

[8] Bhagavan frequently criticised his mother for not being satisfied with the food contributions that automatically came to the ashram. He was initially opposed to her habit of cooking in the ashram, particularly since it involved asking for or buying food ingredients that would not normally be donated.

Bhagavan that made his mother reply in a voice that was loud enough for my subterfuge to be exposed. On this occasion I think Bhagavan chided his mother so that she could increase her feeling of renunciation. He wanted her to realise that she should not be dependent on anything in this world. Even if Bhagavan does not intervene on occasions like this, he is still aware of what is going on. If he remains silent, he does so for the benefit of devotees, not out of ignorance.

Once, while Bhagavan was at Skandashram, I went up the hill with all the required foodstuffs to serve a *bhiksha*. I could not see Bhagavan there so I asked Akhandanandar, who was also known as Appadurai Swami, where he was.

He told me, 'Today is the day when Bhagavan has his shave. So please wait.'

He also told me that since it was full moon day, it was a very auspicious time to receive *upadesa* [verbal teachings] from great souls.

He added, 'When Bhagavan comes, please request him to impart some *upadesa* to you through his gracious words'.

By inclination I am a person who has neither the desire nor the capacity to make such a request. To see Bhagavan, to think of him and to do service to him – these alone were sufficient for my happiness. Furthermore, as someone who had no education, I felt ill-qualified to ask him about anything. And even if I did ask, I felt apprehensive about my ability to understand his reply. However, for some reason, on that particular day, I felt like following the course that Akhandanandar had suggested.

When the shaving was finished Bhagavan came and sat near us. He had not yet taken his bath.

While he was sitting there I approached him, bowed, stood up and then said, 'Bhagavan, kindly tell me something'.

Bhagavan stared at me and asked, 'About what am I to tell you?'

I was both puzzled and nonplussed. A mixture of fear and devotion along with an eagerness to hear Bhagavan's gracious words welled up within me, rendering me incapable of speech. I just stood there mutely.

Bhagavan understood my predicament. No one can hide anything from him. He can understand the state of mind of anyone who approaches him, merely by looking at him.

On this occasion he looked at me graciously and said, 'Be without leaving yourself'.[9]

I could not comprehend the meaning of this high-level *upadesa*, and had no idea how to practise it, but as soon as the words came from Bhagavan's mouth I felt an immense satisfaction and a wonderful effulgence in my mind. These gracious words welled up in my mind again and again like the rising of the tides. The feeling they produced gave me an indescribable happiness. I stood there delighting myself in the feelings produced by this one phrase. Even today, the sound of that *upadesa* rings in my ears and bestows immense peace on me. How is it possible to describe Bhagavan's grace?

What was told? How to be without leaving myself? What is the state of leaving? What is the meaning of 'yourself'? Let the spiritual teachers, the vedantins, explain all these things. To me they are all incomprehensible. What is more, I have no desire to understand them. The happiness that can be attained not only by understanding this sentence, but also by practising it, that same happiness Bhagavan gave me at the moment when the words came from his mouth. I didn't need to understand with my mind because I immediately experienced the state that the words were indicating without ever really understanding what the words themselves meant. I took this immediate experience, this perfect satisfaction, as the fruit of that *upadesa*. I came to understand through this experience that in Bhagavan's benign presence a single gracious utterance can produce the fruit and the fulfilment of all spiritual practices such as *sravana* [hearing], *manana* [thinking or reflection] and *nididhyasana* [contemplation or abidance].

After imparting this instruction Bhagavan continued to sit there for a very long time. I also continued to stand before him. There appears to be a great significance in this. The meaning is that after giving *upadesa* through the words 'Be without leaving yourself', Bhagavan gave a practical illustration of how it could be done by remaining in this state himself.

I used to worship Bhagavan by breaking a coconut, lighting camphor and performing *arati* before him. In the old days on the hill Bhagavan had graciously allowed me to worship like this.

[9] In Tamil '*unnai vidamal iru*'.

Once Bhagavan and the devotees started to do *giri pradakshina*. I was one of the crowd that followed him. I and two of the ladies who accompanied me, Echammal and Kamakshi Ammal, had planned to worship Bhagavan while he was walking around the hill. Breaking coconuts and lighting camphor before Bhagavan inside the ashram was not liked by Chinnaswami. He preferred that such ceremonies be performed in front of the Mother's shrine. So the three of us, without his knowledge, brought all the necessary things to do *puja* to Bhagavan on the *pradakshina* road.

Bhagavan always walked very slowly when he performed *giri pradakshina*. He also used to stop at regular intervals. At one of the resting places Echammal broke a coconut and lighted camphor in Bhagavan's benign presence. At the next halting place Kamakshi did the same. My turn came when Bhagavan halted again outside Gautama Ashram. I broke the coconut, lighted the camphor and bowed to him.

Bhagavan looked at me and asked in a kindly manner: 'Did the three of you bring coconuts and fruit after consulting together?'

Our conspiracy was thus exposed. Bhagavan tolerated our behaviour because he knew that it meant a lot to us to be able to worship him in this way.

During one of the Deepam festivals I went to Skandashram with a coconut and camphor to have *darshan* of Bhagavan. On this visit I met Dandapani Swami, who had recently settled in the ashram, for the first time. Bhagavan was not there when I arrived. When Dandapani Swami saw the coconut and camphor he knew what I had come for. He tried to prevent me from carrying out my plan by ordering me not to worship Bhagavan with the coconut and the camphor. I had no intention of following his orders, but to placate him I kept quiet while he lectured me on how it was against the ashram rules to perform ritual worship to Bhagavan. Finally Bhagavan came.

While he was still walking towards us he looked kindly at me and enquired, 'When did you come?'

This was Bhagavan's standard greeting to me. Whenever I arrived from my village with some food for him, he would always ask me when I had arrived.

Dandapani Swami was quite surprised. He had been ordering and threatening me on the assumption that I was a new devotee

who had never met Bhagavan before. When he saw how well I knew Bhagavan, he calmed down and went away, leaving us alone. In his absence I performed my usual *puja* to Bhagavan, thinking all the while of Bhagavan's grace.

Bhagavan's manner of protecting his devotees is unique. Unlike most spiritual figures he wants nothing from his devotees. Devotees must offer food and *namaskarams* to the heads of *maths* in order to get any grace from them. But Bhagavan is different. When he does not even like the salutations from his devotees, how can there be any desire for the food offerings that the devotees bring? Bhagavan never accepts the worship of devotees when they break coconuts and wave camphor before him. Some of us, who had been devotees for many years, still worshipped him in this way, but Bhagavan did not approve of our activities. He did not prevent us because he knew that it gave us some mental satisfaction, but at the completion of each *puja* he would usually request us not to do it again.

Once I went into the presence of Bhagavan with two coconuts, determined in my mind to offer one to Bhagavan and the other at the Mother's *samadhi*. Bhagavan, of course, knew what my intentions were.

He said, 'I am an idol that eats. In the temple there is an idol that doesn't eat. Break the coconut before the God who doesn't eat.'

On another occasion, just before I started *giri pradakshina*, I lighted camphor in Bhagavan's presence, prostrated and left. I learned later that after I had gone a few boys also burnt camphor in Bhagavan's presence and prostrated to him.

Bhagavan complained, 'All this happened on account of Akhilandamma'.

Bhagavan is the one who bestows grace without being asked. Does he shower his grace merely in exchange for our *puja* offerings? No! Is not grace his natural state?

It is well known that many of the devotees who had *darshan* of Bhagavan Sri Ramana during his early days at Arunachala adored him as Jnanasambandhar himself. That sage also attained Self-realisation in his childhood. Those who ponder over the two lives will discover many other similarities between the two. Bhagavan himself frequently praised the *jnana* of Jnanasambandhar. The birthday of both of them is Ardhra

Darshanam,[10] both were strongly drawn to Arunachala, and both reached it by the same route. On the way to Arunachala both halted at the Araiyaninallur temple. The sceptre of *jnana* that Jnanasambandhar wielded till his sixteenth year was taken over by Bhagavan, also in his sixteenth year. The similarities between the two are very striking. Because of this, when the Guru *puja* of Jnanasambandhar was celebrated every year at Sri Ramanasramam, I always used to go there, have Bhagavan's *darshan* and offer *bhiksha*.

After cooking started at Sri Ramanasramam, I still wanted to offer *bhiksha* to all Bhagavan's devotees, but how could I offer it to the brahmins? I resolved the problem by purchasing vegetables and other provisions and giving them to the ashram with instructions that they should be prepared for the brahmins. I myself used to cook the food for Bhagavan and the other non-brahmin devotees and bring it to the ashram. In the early days of Sri Ramanasramam, when the cooking facilities were not very well developed, Bhagavan never made any critical comments about my habit of preparing and bringing food in this way. However, when the ashram began to expand, a big dining room was constructed in which it was possible to cook and serve several hundred meals a day. Even then, I stuck to my old practice of cooking food at home and bringing it to the ashram.

Once, after the dining room had been built,[11] I brought

[10] Jnanasambandhar, meaning, 'he who is related to the Lord through divine wisdom', was a child prodigy who lived, according to the estimate of most modern scholars, around the end of the sixth century AD. His traditional biography states that he had mastered all vedic knowledge by the time he was three years old, and that he began composing poems in praise of Siva even earlier. This gift for poetry was given to him in a miraculous way by Siva himself. Jnanasambandhar spent the remainder of his short but eventful life travelling around southern India, accompanied by a large number of devotees. His poems form a major part of the *Tevarams*, the early canonical works of the South India branch of Saivism. At the age of sixteen his parents arranged a marriage for him, but before it could take place, Siva appeared before him in a great blaze of light and invited the saint to join him. Jnanasambandhar accepted the invitation and vanished from the world, along with his entire wedding party.

Jnanasambandhar's verses praising Siva as the 'Lord of Annamalai' (Arunachala) are still widely sung all over Tamil Nadu.

[11] This happened in the late 1930s, by which time Akhilandamma had been bringing food regularly for more than thirty-five years.

bhiksha to the ashram on the Guru *puja* of Jnanasambandhar.

Bhagavan looked at me and said, 'Why all this trouble for you? If you donate some provisions, the ashramites can cook them and serve them.'

From that time on, unable to disobey the gracious order of Bhagavan, I gave the ashram whatever food I could in order to continue my service. I still managed to do some cooking for Bhagavan and the devotees because from that time on I was permitted to assist with the preparation of the ashram breakfast. Since Bhagavan did not say anything about this, whenever I go to the ashram I still have the good fortune of preparing the morning breakfast.

In Bhagavan's last days, while I was staying in Desur, I was frequently thinking and worrying about Bhagavan's health. I decided that I had to come and see him because my desire for *darshan* and the grief I was feeling on account of his suffering were both very great. When I reached the gates of the ashram, a brahmin, who was not known to me, prevented me from entering. He ordered me to stay outside. I was immediately struck with an unbearable grief because at that time my yearning to see Bhagavan was very great. Fortunately, by Bhagavan's grace, an inmate of the ashram who knew me came to that place. The barriers, rules and regulations that had been formed to maintain the tranquillity of the ashram in those final days could not withstand the surging tides of my ocean of grief. When this devotee informed Bhagavan that I had arrived, I was given permission to enter the ashram and have *darshan*. I tried to suppress my emotions as I went into Bhagavan's room, but the feeling that I would soon be losing my one and only God completely destroyed my self-restraint.

I cried out to him, 'Bhagavan! Bhagavan has decided to give up his body. What can I do?'

There were thousands of good souls outside who, like me, had been wanting to have Bhagavan's *darshan*. Is it not the boundless grace of Bhagavan that I alone was admitted inside? Musing on this graciousness I bowed to my Lord and came out in a perplexed state of mind. It goes without saying that I was very unwilling to leave. After I had left the room, Bhagavan sent me the following message via the devotee who had opened the door for me.

'Why do you feel sorry for this mortal body?'

It occurred to me that Bhagavan was consoling me by saying, 'Don't feel sorry for this body, I am always your saviour!'

When the import of this message registered with me, I experienced a feeling of mental clarity.

When Bhagavan finally attained *mahasamadhi* my mind sank into an unfathomable ocean of grief. Later, when I discovered that Bhagavan's grace and benign presence were still permeating my heart, the grief I felt on account of his physical disappearance abated. Now, on my visits to Tiruvannamalai I worship at the *lingam* that has been installed on Bhagavan's *samadhi*, I have *darshan* of Sri Ramana's devotees and I offer them *bhiksha* according to my means and ability. I hope to spend the small remaining portion of my life [this was written in the 1950s when she was over ninety years of age] continuing with these activities.

Sadhu Natanananda

Sadhu Natanananda (1898–1981) was a schoolteacher called Natesa Mudaliar when he first heard about Bhagavan. The story of how he became a devotee has been told in several books. The following account combines events from Arthur Osborne's Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge *and Kunju Swami's* Enadu Ninaivugal.

[Natesa Mudaliar] was an elementary schoolteacher when he read the works of Vivekananda. After going through them he became fired with an eagerness to renounce the world and find a Guru. A friend told him of the Swami on Arunachala Hill but added that it was well nigh impossible to seek upadesa *from him. Nevertheless, Mudaliar decided to try. It was 1918 and Sri Bhagavan was already living at Skandashram. Mudaliar went there and sat before him, but Sri Bhagavan remained silent. Mudaliar, not presuming to speak first, came away disappointed.*

Mudaliar did not realise that Bhagavan's true instruction was through silence. He returned home but came to see Sri Bhagavan frequently. After several visits, during which Sri Bhagavan still declined to speak to him, he decided to perform a walking pilgrimage to Varanasi.

On the way there, at Sri Perumbuthur, a Vaishnavite saint heard his story and told him, 'What a stupid decision! The only person who can save you is Ramana Maharshi. You must go back to him again! I will not let you take a single step beyond here.'

He spoke very angrily and sent him back to Tiruvannamalai.

Mudaliar turned back, but instead of going directly to Tiruvannamalai, he wrote a long letter to Bhagavan, imploring him not to be selfishly indifferent to the fate of longing souls. He asked permission to come again since he believed that his previous visits had been ineffective. A month passed with no reply.

Next he sent a registered letter, acknowledgement due, and this time he wrote: 'However many rebirths I have to go through, I am determined to receive upadesa *from you and you alone. So you will have to be reborn for that purpose if you give me up in this life as too unprepared or immature to receive your* upadesa. *I swear to this.'*

A few days later Sri Bhagavan appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Do not think continually of me. You must first obtain the grace of the God Maheswara [Siva], the Lord of the Bull. First meditate on him and secure his grace. My help will follow as a matter of course.'

Mudaliar had a picture in his house of the God Maheswara riding upon a bull and he took this as a support for meditation. A few days later he received an answer to his letter from Vasudeva Sastri, who was at that time teaching in the Veda Patasala[1] in Tiruvannamalai.

The letter said: 'The Maharshi does not reply to letters; you can come and see him in person.'

Before setting out for Tiruvannamalai he wrote once more to make sure that the letter was written at Sri Bhagavan's bidding. Following the course prescribed in his dream, he went first to the great temple in town and had darshan *of Lord Arunachaleswara. After* darshan *he decided to spend the night there. A brahmin whom he met in the temple tried to dissuade him from his purpose [of visiting Bhagavan].*

'Listen, I have spent sixteen years near Ramana Maharshi, trying in vain to obtain his anugraha *[grace]. He is indifferent to everything. Even if you break your head he will not be interested to ask why. Since it is impossible to obtain his grace, there is no point in your visiting him.'*

...Natesa Mudaliar was not the sort of man to be put off.

Since he insisted on going, the other told him, 'Anyhow, you can find out in the following way whether you will have the good luck to obtain his grace. There is a Swami on the hill by the name of Seshadri who mixes with none and who generally drives away people who try to approach

[1] A school that teaches boys to chant the *Vedas*.

him. If you can obtain some mark of favour from him it will be a good augury for success.'

Next morning Mudaliar set out with J. V. Subramanya Iyer, a colleague in his profession, in quest of the elusive Seshadri Swami.

After much searching they saw him and, to Mudaliar's relief and astonishment, he addressed Mudaliar: 'My poor child! Why are you grieving and anxious? What is jnana? *After the mind rejects objects, one after another, as transient and unreal, that which survives this elimination is* jnana. *That is God. Everything is That and That alone. It is folly to run hither and thither in the belief that* jnana *can be attained by going to a hill or cave. Go without fear.' Thus did he give ... his* upadesa *... in the very words that Bhagavan might have used.*[2]

Buoyed up by this propitious augury, they proceeded up the hillside to Skandashram. It was about noon when they arrived. For five or six hours Mudaliar sat before Bhagavan with no words passing between them. Then the evening meal was ready and Sri Bhagavan rose to go out.

J. V. S. Iyer said to him, 'This is the man who wrote those letters'.

Sri Bhagavan looked fixedly at him and then turned and went out, still without speaking.

Month after month Mudaliar came back for a day and sat there, mutely imploring, but Sri Bhagavan never spoke to him, nor did he presume to speak first. After a full year had elapsed in this way, he could endure it no longer.

Summoning up his courage and suppressing his feeling that speaking first was somehow disrespectful, he said to Bhagavan, 'I wish to learn and experience what your grace is, as people differ in their accounts of it'.

Sri Bhagavan replied: 'I am always giving my grace. If you can't apprehend it, what am I to do?'[3]

[2] When Sri Bhagavan heard about this teaching he marvelled by saying, 'Ah! How clearly Seshadri has taught *Brahma vidya* [knowledge of *Brahman*]! Are they calling such a great man a madman? Strange indeed are the ways of the world!' (*Sri Ramana Darshanam*, 1st ed. p. 66.) The footnote on p. 368 of *Enadu Ninaivugal* contains a similar statement.

[3] In Kunju Swami's version, Bhagavan gives the following reply: 'Grace is always shining. It is not a [periodic] activity. It is causeless and natural

Even then Mudaliar did not understand the silent upadesa. *He was still confused as to what path he should follow.*

Shortly afterwards Sri Bhagavan appeared to him in a dream and said: 'Let your vision be unified and withdrawn from objects, both external and internal. Thus, as differences disappear you will progress.'

Mudaliar, who understood this to apply to his physical sight, replied: 'This does not seem to me to be the right way. If such a superior person as you gives me advice like this, who will give me true advice?'

However, Sri Bhagavan assured him that it was the right way.

Mudaliar himself has described the next development: 'I followed this dream upadesa *for a while. Then I had another dream. This time Sri Bhagavan appeared to me while my father was standing nearby and asked, "Who is this?" With some hesitation about the philosophical accuracy of the answer, I replied, "My father". Maharshi smiled at me significantly and I added, "My answer is in accordance with common parlance, not with philosophy," because I remembered I was not the body. Maharshi drew me to him and placed his palm first on my head, and then on my right breast, pressing his finger over the nipple. It was rather painful, but as it was his grace I endured it quietly. I did not know then why he pressed the right breast instead of the left.'*[4]

Thus, having failed to receive the silent initiation, he was given, even though in a dream, initiation by touch.

Mudaliar was one of those whose eagerness and desire to make every effort drove them to the idea of becoming a sannyasin. *As in other cases, Sri Bhagavan discouraged this.*

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and shines uninterruptedly. It can be experienced by constant meditation, performed earnestly, in the form of Self-attention [*ahamukham*].' (*Enadu Ninaivugal* p. 369.) It is not clear from the context whether this is a different rendering of the same reply or a remark spoken on a different occasion.

[4] Bhagavan was touching the spiritual heart-centre, the place in the body where the mind rises and dissolves. Bhagavan persistently refused to initiate people by touching them. Even though this incident occurred in a dream, this can be taken as a rare example of physical initiation.

'Just as you avoid the cares of home life while you are here, go home and try to be equally unconcerned and unaffected there.'

Mudaliar still lacked the full reliance and conviction of a disciple towards his Guru and he made the renunciation despite Bhagavan's clear injunction. He found, as Sri Bhagavan had predicted, that the difficulties on his path grew greater not less. After some time he returned to his family and took up work again.[5]

After this his devotion deepened and he began to compose Tamil poems in praise of Bhagavan. And at last he received, more fully than most others, the verbal instructions that he had longed for, for it was he who was the recipient of a large part of the expositions contained in Upadesa Manjari [Spiritual Instruction] *in which is most beautifully set forth the doctrine of the Guru and his grace.*

This account, with minor variations, appears in all the major biographies of Bhagavan. Sadhu Natanananda's own account of how he became a devotee, which is given below as the first part of his reminiscences, appears to contradict this story. In his own version Bhagavan spoke to him at their first meeting. Also, Natanananda indicates that it was the saint from Sri Perumbuthur who first told him about Bhagavan. I have spoken to several people who knew Sadhu Natanananda well, but none of them has been able to explain these apparently contradictory accounts.

A few years after he became a devotee, Sadhu Natanananda was the recipient of a remarkable assurance from Bhagavan. He himself has described the circumstances in which it took place.

On one Vyasapurnima *day [a festival that is celebrated on the day of the July-August full moon], Ganapati Muni,*

[5] According to Kunju Swami (personal conversation) Natanananda asked Bhagavan to give him the orange robes of a *sannyasin*. Natanananda had brought the cloth to Bhagavan's hall but Bhagavan refused to touch it. Natanananda then put the cloth on the stool in front of Bhagavan that visitors put their offerings on. After a few minutes he took it away and began to wear it. A few months later, when Natanananda decided to give up his life as a *sannyasin*, he presented the orange robes to Bhagavan. For the rest of his life he only ever wore white clothes.

Kapali Sastri, along with a group of Sanskrit scholars, were walking around the mountain. They stopped off at the ashram to pay their respects to the Maharshi. When they were seated in the old hall they started discussing philosophy in Sanskrit. I was listening to the discussion, and I knew that they were discussing philosophy, but I could not follow the meaning. Because of this my mind began to wander and I became quite agitated, wondering when the day would dawn when I would have the experiences that they were talking about. My longing for these experiences was so intense that I lost all consciousness of the body. I was not sure how long I remained in that state, but suddenly a voice brought back my normal consciousness. All the others had left and only Bhagavan remained in the hall.

'Why are you so dejected?' said the voice. 'If you were really unfit to realise the Self in this life, then you could not have come to this place at all. The power that drew you here will make you realise the Self. If not today, it is bound to fulfil its commitment. There is no reason why you should feel dejected.'

It was these gracious words that brought me back to life, and peace entered my soul immediately.[6]

Sadhu Natanananda was a distinguished scholar, although he never liked to show off his erudition. In addition to compiling Upadesa Manjari, *he edited the question-and-answer version of* Vichara Sangraha [Self-Enquiry] *and wrote the essay version of the same work himself. He also, at Bhagavan's request, arranged the verses of* Guru Vachaka Kovai *in their current order and categories. This work, composed by Muruganar, records in Tamil verse teachings that Bhagavan gave out in the 1920s and 30s.*

The following accounts are mostly taken from a Tamil book, Sri Ramana Darshanam, *that he wrote in the 1950s. His style is more philosophical and didactic than most of the other devotees who wrote about Bhagavan. This is, I suspect, because he was not*

[6] *The Mountain Path*, 1981, p. 235. This incident is also reported in *Self-Realization* (7th ed. 1968) p. 223, but that account does not explicitly state that Natanananda was spiritually mature enough to realise the Self before he died.

interested in merely retelling stories. He wanted to use them to illuminate and explain various aspects of Bhagavan's life, character and teachings.

The Turning Point

I was twenty years old in 1917-18 and a schoolmaster. Being naturally of a pious disposition I used to go about from place to place frequently to have *darshan* of the deities installed in temples. A noble soul who saw this brought to me of his own accord two books in Tamil, *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam* and *Sri Vivekananda Vijayam*, and asked me to read them. As soon as I had read them I was seized with an intense longing for obtaining the vision of God and for finding a Guru who would show the way to it. While I was engaged in this search I heard about the extraordinary greatness of Bhagavan Sri Ramana through a holy person whom I happened to meet at Sri Perumbuthur. On 2nd May 1918, I saw Sri Ramana for the first time at Skandashram on Arunachala.

I beseeched him fervently in the following words: 'It is my great desire that I should actually experience your gracious wisdom. Kindly fulfil my desire.'

In those days Sri Ramana was not speaking much. Still, he spoke kindly as follows: 'Is it the body in front of me that desires to obtain my grace? Or is it the awareness within it? If it is the awareness, is it not now looking upon itself as the body and making this request? If so, let the awareness first of all know its real nature. It will then automatically know God and my grace. The truth of this can be realised even here and now.'

Besides speaking like this, he also explained it in the following way, using examples from my daily experience that I could understand and relate to.

'It is not the body that desires to obtain the grace. Therefore, it is clear that it is the awareness that shines here as "you". To you who are the nature of awareness there is no connection during sleep with the body, the senses, the life force [*prana*] and the mind. On waking up you identify yourself with them, even without your knowledge. This is your experience. All that you have to do hereafter is see that you do not identify yourself with them. In the states of waking and dream try to remain as you were in the state of deep sleep. As you are by nature

unattached, you have to convert the state of ignorant deep sleep, in which you were formless and unattached, into conscious deep sleep. It is only by doing this that you can remain established in your real nature. You should never forget that this experience will come only through long practice. This experience will make it clear that your real nature is not different from the nature of God."[7]

God, Guru and Self

'I have seen God! I have seen him face to face! I am seeing God just as clearly as you are seeing me. Those who have seen the truth can also show it to others. There is no room for doubt in these direct revelations.'

These were the words of grace vouchsafed by Sri Ramakrishna. By these divine visions he revealed that Self-realisation was possible through the grace of the great ones. Appearing in the latter part of the same century in South India, Bhagavan Sri Ramana, who shone as the sun of the Self, shedding his grace throughout the world, went one step further [in his pronouncements] than Sri Ramakrishna. In his teachings he proclaimed that there is no God apart from the person who sees him; that there is no one who is not aware of his own being; that one's own being is God's being; and that being is both the Self and God. Sri Bhagavan summarised these ideas when he proclaimed the divine nature of man in the following terms.

'There is no one who has not seen God. God vision is natural to all. Ignorance is only the non-awareness of the truth of this natural Self-experience. As wrong knowledge, *ajnana,* is only ego, which is the attachment to the body, loss of ego is itself the attainment of God. Knowing oneself is knowing God and knowing God is only being God. Since Self-realisation is God

[7] This section has been taken from *The Mountain Path*, 1969, pp. 108–9. I have taken the liberty both in this and subsequent sections of breaking up some of Natanananda's very long sentences into shorter ones. If I had not done this, many of his ideas would have been very difficult to follow. The literary Tamil that Natanananda wrote often has sentences that are more than a page long. Though these are elegant and comprehensible in Tamil, a literal rendering of them would produce long sequences of sub-clauses that would cloud rather than illumine the reader's understanding.

realisation, Self and God are not two different things.'

Bhagavan confirmed this when he wrote verses twenty-four and twenty-five of *Upadesa Undiyar*:

> 24 By their existing nature, God and soul are only one substance. Their adjunct [*upadhi*] knowledge alone is different.
> 25 Knowing oneself, having given up adjuncts [*upadhis*], is itself knowing God because he shines as one's Self.[8]

Thus, Self-realisation, which appeared to be rare and difficult to attain, even for the *rishis* of yore such as Suka, was demonstrated as an experience natural to all by Sri Bhagavan, who shone as the bestower of *jnana* and redeemed all.

With the intention of delivering mankind, and following the common tactic of catching a wild deer by showing a tame one, Lord Siva assumed many forms. First among these was that of Sri Dakshinamurti, the primal Guru. The Self-knowledge that he then graciously revealed through *mauna-mudra* [the gesture of silence] had by modern times degenerated into mere scriptural learning and imagination. Mankind was indulging in self-deception and was thus about to be afflicted by the great sin of killing *Brahman* [by failing to recognise it]. Seeing this sorry state of affairs, the same Sri Dakshinamurti manifested as Sri Maharshi and revealed through his own experience that *mauna* [silence] is the meaning of the *mahavakyas*.[9] Although many are not aware of this truth, the secret of his divine incarnation

[8] *Upadesa Undiyar* is probably better known under its Sanskrit title *Upadesa Saram*. It is a thirty-verse poem composed by Sri Ramana in Tamil in 1927.

Adjunct knowledge is a translation of the Sanskrit term *upadhi*. An *upadhi* is a limitation or a restriction that is superimposed on consciousness. The mind, one's sense of being an individual person, is an *upadhi*, as is any other concept that places limits or subdivisions on consciousness.

'Consciousness is the reality. When that consciousness is associated with *upadhis* you speak of self-consciousness, unconsciousness, sub-consciousness, superconsciousness, human consciousness, dog-consciousness, tree consciousness, and so on. The unaltering common factor in all of them is consciousness.' (*Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 591.)

[9] The *mahavakyas* are the four great upanishadic statements that proclaim the unity of the individual and *Brahman*. In traditional vedantic

is indeed only that. In accordance with the dictum of *Vasishtam*, 'Attaining any state other than the state of *mauna* in which all whirling *vasanas* have been destroyed, is not good', Sri Bhagavan always indicated through his silence that the state of *mauna* is the natural state of humanity. Further, he also explained in words that this state that transcends the mind cannot be described except by silence. Thus among the great teachers who incarnated to reveal the supreme state through silence, Sri Ramana is the one who comes next to the primal Guru, Sri Dakshinamurti. While those who were blessed by Dakshinamurti were only four, Sri Ramana was always surrounded by thousands of devotees.[10]

The mode of teaching adopted by the ancient Gurus was to indicate through Self-awareness the natural state of man. Sri Bhagavan followed not only this method but also the modern method of explaining verbally the natural state to those who did not have the capacity to experience it through their subtle intuition. This, in fact, was the reason why innumerable devotees regarded him as their *Sadguru.*

To those devotees who complained that, despite staying in his presence for a long time, they were not able to experience his grace palpably, Sri Bhagavan had the following words of grace:

'Bhagavan is always bestowing grace. To regard the real as unreal and the unreal as real is alone ignorance. You yourself are always shining naturally as "I", "I". Does Bhagavan exist

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meditation, practitioners contemplate their meaning in order to generate the conviction that *Brahman* alone exists.

[10] Many devotees noted the parallels between Dakshinamurti, who enlightened his four disciples by sitting in silence with them, and Bhagavan who stated on many occasions that silence was his preferred medium of teaching. Bhagavan himself, though, never claimed that he was in any way a manifestation of Dakshinamurti. He did, though, accept the traditional idea that Dakshinamurti was the primal Guru from whom all other Gurus could trace their lineage:

'Just as a plantain tree produces shoots, before yielding fruits and perishing, and these shoots, being transplanted, do the same again, so also the original primeval Master of antiquity [Dakshinamurti], who cleared the doubts of his *rishi* disciples in silence, has left shoots which are ever multiplying. The Guru is the shoot of that Dakshinamurti.' (*Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 17.)

apart from that true awareness? It is the attachment to the body that causes the appearance of the two different entities "you" and "I". If, through Self-attention, it [body-attachment] is itself transformed into Self-awareness, and if thereby one realises that the reality is only one, where, then, is the scope for saying "you" or "I"? Remaining still, having realised the truth as it is, is the Guru's grace.'

After explaining the true nature of man in this way, Sri Bhagavan would often then demonstrate the truth of his statement by remaining still with a fixed gaze.

Despite not following any of the practices and shows prevalent in the various religious establishments that function in the names of *Sadgurus* of yore, Sri Ramana was always surrounded by a great many devotees. However, in the early days, pseudo-vedantins used to debate among themselves about Sri Bhagavan:

'What instruction does Sri Ramana give, and to whom? Does he at least prescribe rules and regulations for his disciples? If only he had approached some other Guru and learned something, at least a few of the characteristics of a teacher would be present in him. While a student, still at school, he became a victim of some delusion. Suddenly he left home and came to Arunachala, shaved his head and started wearing a loincloth. He spent many years in silence. That is all.

'Does he have the proper qualification of hearing, reflection etc?[11] Only one who has become a *brahma-nishta* [one who is firmly established in *Brahman*] through hearing, reflection, etc. can be a *Sadguru*. If his qualifications are so poor, what can one say about all the fools who have gathered around him? That is why all the devotees of Ramana are seen to be without any discipline!'

Such used to be the talk among the pseudo-vedantins.

Others complained, 'He is spending all his time in observing mere silence without knowing anything. At least let me teach him something and put him on the right path.'

With such benevolent ideas some came to Ramana to give him *upadesa* but finally took him as their *Sadguru*. Such was

[11] *Sravana, manana* and *nididhyasana* (hearing, reflection and contemplation) are the three traditional stages of practice in vedantic meditation.

their good fortune. Some with depraved minds came with the idea that they would become famous by mesmerising him through their initiation tricks, but they had to return disappointed.

The supremacy of the Guru's silence in these circumstances is described by Bhagavan in the following verses:

> Guru, the Lord of *jnana*, who is the power of the unlimited greatness of the Self, is the supreme silence that completely defeats the worthless arguments of those who are stained with the delusion of worldly desires.
> Without killing the body, but by killing, with the glance of his eyes, the ego that poses as if it were really existing, the Guru in no time exposes all unrealities as non-existent, and reveals the shining of the one Supreme Self as the only real existence.
> It is impossible to see the divine dance of Self-knowledge in the Heart until the dance of the rebellious mind is destroyed by the divine power of the sword of true knowledge, wielded by the great hero, the *Sadguru* who has already beheaded [his own] ghost, the mind.[12]

Bhagavan never used to prescribe disciplines for anyone. His nature was to instruct by following himself all the disciplines of conduct enjoined upon spiritual aspirants. However, he never permitted excesses by those who relied entirely on him. Instead, he used to correct them in private with kind words. There were some who complained that Bhagavan was not publicly censuring the deficiencies in the conduct of some devotees.

Coming to realise the distress of one such person, Sri Bhagavan revealed his views on the matter through the following words: 'Who is to correct whom? Is it not the Lord alone who has the authority to correct everyone? All we can do is to correct ourselves. That itself is correcting others.'

The Supreme Self, which was expounded as a third person [that is, he, she or it rather than the first person 'I'] by the great incarnations like Krishna, Buddha, Jesus and Mohammad, is now revealed by Maharshi as the first person through the following explanations:

[12] *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, vv. 280–2.

'Awareness is the real nature of man. In his natural state man is not aware of anything. Why? Because that which exists is only one. Its nature is awareness of existence. As this is the natural state of man, in that supreme space [of consciousness], which is non-dual and whole, there is no room for dualities and trinities.

'Thus the science of the Self is nothing but man recognising clearly his true nature as the mere existence-consciousness. This Self-awareness, which has no limitation and no "otherness", is described as "knowledge-sight" [*jnana-drishti*] and Self-knowledge.

'As the Supreme Self is described as whole [*paripurna*], and as the marks of wholeness are non-duality and undividedness, in the state of the Supreme Self it is known that the seeming trinity of seeing, seer and object seen does not exist in absolute truth, but only [arises] due to imagination.'

Bhagavan's Presence and Grace

Although Sri Ramana was adored by his devotees as Bhagavan, Maharshi, and by some as a divine incarnation, to others he only showed himself as an ordinary person. As his form itself, appearing as grace personified because of its divine lustre, was captivating everyone's heart, only very few could have seen him through their unconditioned sight as he really was. However, to see his external form was itself adequate for experiencing the bliss of peace.

Sri Bhagavan's view of himself and of others was completely different from that of ordinary people who do not know their real nature. Not only was he aware of his own real nature, he clearly knew the truth of others'. Because, even when he was in the midst of thousands of devotees of varied temperaments, he always remained steadfast in the awareness of the Supreme Self, and without swerving in the least from his state, he had the equal vision of seeing everyone as his own Self.

To those who have received the *jnani's* look of grace, that look of the supreme space of consciousness is their abode and their refuge. Sri Bhagavan demonstrated the truth of his statement [in *Who am I?*], 'Those on whom the gracious glance of the Guru has fallen will never be abandoned', to those who received his look of grace. Just as the waters of the holy Ganges

purify all those who touch them, the divine look of a *jnani* also purifies all those on whom it falls. Sri Bhagavan exemplified in every way the fact that the enlightened ones, although in human garb, are in their nature really divine.

Just like the philosopher's stone, which has the wonderful power of turning base iron into noble gold, Sri Bhagavan's presence transformed even unfit persons into blessed ones. After many years of silence, when Sri Bhagavan started speaking a little, like bees swarming to a blossoming flower, the world of the intelligentsia started gathering around him. Some proud people, who had learned a little of Vedanta in the same way that they learned the *Vedas,*[13] and who were in the habit of proclaiming themselves to be *Brahman*, could not bear to see the position of supreme eminence that Bhagavan was beginning to get. Out of envy they used to go to his presence with the intention of humiliating him by arguments. As soon as Bhagavan's look fell on them, like a cat that has seen a tiger, they were stunned and remained motionless like statues. After remaining in this state for a long period, receiving new light and feeling penitent, they would beg his forgiveness with great feeling.

Sri Bhagavan, bestowing on them his gracious look, would console them, saying with a smiling face, 'When all are existing as He, who is to forgive whom? Abstaining from *droha* [treachery, harm, injury] to oneself is sufficient for salvation.'

Such interesting incidents used to take place every now and then in those days.

It is well-known that Adi-Sankara, extolled as 'the world teacher', won over many famous pandits who professed the superiority of action [followers of karma *kanda*] and the bigoted adherents of various other cults by his superb intellectual power. None could equal or excel him in advaitic knowledge. The power of grace that was seen as speech in Sankara, and which shone throughout the world, that same power of grace manifested in Sri Ramana as his divine look and shone as the supreme light that purified the world by a mere glance. Between these two, there is not the slightest difference in their divine nature.

Sri Bhagavan has said, 'God and the *jnani* are one. Knowing

[13] He presumably means by memorising rather than by truly understanding.

oneself as the being-consciousness, having set aside the body, is alone knowing God. God consciousness is not different from the being-consciousness that is one's own real nature. Knowing God is only being the Self. The supreme spirit [*Parabrahman*] and the *stitha prajna* [one who is established in transcendental wisdom], who has the firm experience of the Self, are identical because of the experience of the unlimited true awareness.'

Sri Bhagavan, who graciously explained in this way the truth of the *Sadguru*, was himself a standing testimony to this truth. Just as the sun in the form of fire generates its own fire nature through the medium of the magnifying glass on which its rays fall, Sri Ramana, in the form of the light of awareness, generated his Self-awareness in the hearts of those on whom his divine look fell. This experience of Self-abidance is automatically obtained in the presence of the *jnani* who unceasingly abides in the Self. Bhagavan has confirmed this in the following verse:

> The glance of him [the *jnani*] who is rich in true knowledge, which is the supreme life that surges like the rising of a hundred suns without ever diminishing, will easily bestow the unequalled *jnana* upon those who bathe in it, thereby saving them and leading them to the goal of immortality.[14]

Just as air, which is blemishless in its nature, has foul or good odour by virtue of what it associates with, the mind, which is essentially sattvic in its real nature, acquires good or evil qualities because of association with them. It is said by the great ones that the divine trait of *sattva* is the enduring quality of the mind, whereas the traits of *rajas* and *tamas*[15] are unnatural and therefore can be changed. It is also said that association with the wise is the means for effecting this transformation. Realising the truth of the above from their experience, some devotees used to tell Sri Bhagavan that the tranquillity of mood experienced effortlessly in his presence was not obtained even by great effort elsewhere. They would pray to him to grant the same peace experienced in his presence elsewhere also.

[14] *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, v. 1127.

[15] The interplay and relative predominance of three qualities (*gunas*) *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* determine the state and purity of one's mind. *Sattva* is purity or harmony, *rajas* is activity or excitement and *tamas* is dullness or torpor.

Sri Bhagavan, as though approving their prayer, would say, 'Yes, yes. Just as the mother of pearl converts the raindrop it receives into pearl, the mature ones get redeemed by taking the divine look of the *Sadguru* as his grace. But the immature ones, despite staying in the Guru's presence for a long time, do not realise anything. They are like a donkey that carries precious camphor [without being aware of its value].

'There is no partiality in the Guru's grace. The sunlight that shines uniformly everywhere is reflected only by subtle and pure substances such as mirrors and water, and not by other materials. Similarly, although the grace of the Guru is bestowed equally on all, those with impure minds, which have the blemish of restless and impure thoughts, do not obtain peace from it. Yet, just as they do in the Guru's presence, if they[16] also practise in other places in a state of non-association with external objects, in due course they can attain unceasing tranquility of mind.'

The lamp inside a pot fails to illuminate because of the limitations of the pot. Similarly, the Supreme Self appears to have lost its Self-awareness because of the body limitation. However, like the sun's presence causing the lotus bud to blossom, the presence of the *Sadguru* cuts the knot connecting the body and the Self. The same Supreme Self, when it is externalised, becomes the mind. When it is aware of itself it remains as awareness. Therefore the *jnani* and the ignorant in their nature are like ruby and crystal respectively. Although crystal is lustrous, it takes on the colours of the objects surrounding it. In the same way, the ignorant one, who in truth is awareness, becomes a *jiva* because of taking on or absorbing the I-am-the-body idea. The ruby, even in the presence of objects, not only retains its own natural lustre, it also transforms the colour of nearby objects to its own colour. Following this analogy, the *jnani* not only never loses his Self-awareness, he also turns those who approach him into himself.

The state of firm Self-awareness, extolled highly in the *Bhagavad Gita*, was normal and effortless to Sri Bhagavan. Therefore, like the magnifying glass that generates heat because of the mere presence of the sun, many devotees attained the

[16] Presumably the pure-minded ones since it has already been stated that those with impure minds do not experience peace even in the proximity of the Guru.

state of Self-abidance by merely having the *darshan* of the Maharshi. Many intimate devotees knew this from their own experience.

The multitude of devotees who were sanctified by Maharshi's *darshan* included many animals too. Although it is common to come across many human beings with animal natures, it is extremely rare to see an animal with human nature.

Sri Bhagavan himself once pointed out the sanctity of [the ashram cow] Lakshmi by saying, 'What *tapas* she must have performed in her previous births! It may be that she is living in our midst now only to complete her unfinished *tapas*.'

Once, when she came as usual for Bhagavan's *darshan* and was standing in his presence, Sri Bhagavan, looking out at her with great affection started stroking her head.

Then, turning to the other devotees with a smile, he asked, 'Do you know what state Lakshmi is in now?' When no answer was forthcoming, he astonished us by saying, 'She is in *nirvikalpa samadhi*,' thus revealing the extraordinary power of his grace and the spiritual maturity of Lakshmi.

When Lakshmi finally attained *nirvana*, her body was entombed in the traditional manner, in the presence of Sri Bhagavan, within the ashram premises. A memorial was then erected on top of her. Among all those who took refuge in Sri Bhagavan, only Lakshmi had the good fortune of having an epitaph written by Sri Bhagavan himself confirming her liberation.

The following is what he wrote on that occasion: '*Visakam* [star], the twelfth day of the waxing moon, Friday the 5th of *Ani* [month], in the year named *Sarvadhari* [18th June 1948], is the liberation day of Lakshmi the cow.'

Among the fortunate animals that were the recipients of Bhagavan's grace, there were dogs, peacocks, squirrels and cows. Indeed, the life history of each one of them is wonderful. Thus, when it is seen that even animals attained mental quiescence by the extraordinary power of Bhagavan's presence, will it not be superfluous to speak about the human devotees? During the half century of his manifestation as Grace Divine at Arunachala, innumerable were the instances and infinite were the ways in which Sri Bhagavan showered his grace on all those who approached him.

The Necessity of Grace

Sri Ganapati Muni, who had obtained the grace of Saraswati [the goddess of learning], had superb intellectual powers. He had mastered all the scriptures and was famous as Mantreswara [the Lord of the Mantras] and Kavyakantha [the one from whose throat poetry flows]. He was awarded this latter title because of his ability to compose extempore poetry in Sanskrit. Believing firmly that it was possible to secure the five divine powers [creation, preservation, destruction, veiling and grace] through the worship of Sakti and by yogic practices, he had spent many years performing intense *tapas*. He had also observed severe vows and in the process had had many wonderful visions. However, as Bhagavan notes in the following verse, the experience of *jnana* comes from contact with a *jnani*, not from a rigid pursuit of external disciplines:

> Though one has shaken off all vices, secured all virtues, renounced all relatives, and observed all the austerities prescribed by the *sastras*, can one reach eternal bliss unless one meets the *jnana* Guru?[17]

Before Ganapati Muni came to see Bhagavan, he had about sixty disciples of his own. Most of them were lawyers and scholars. All people fell at his feet, taking him to be a *mahamuni* [great sage].

He once said, 'In those days so many people used to do *namaskaram* to me. One day, when I thought about this, I got the feeling, "What is the difference between them and me? Nothing. What have I attained or known except that I have read a lot? I have only tortured my body through exercises in detachment, thinking this to be *tapas*. But nothing more have I newly understood." This new knowledge dawned on me when I came to Arunachala in 1907. At that time, fortunately, the remembrance of Bhagavan came to me. "What is it?" I thought. "People say that a young boy on the hill is keeping quiet, and that he has had his eyes closed for the last nine years. How can he remain like this unless he has achieved some great state?" Then some clarity dawned in me.'

This awareness of his own inadequacy was a new feeling for

[17] *Guru Vachaka Kovai* v. 321.

Ganapati Muni. Prior to that day he had always been proud of his knowledge and status.

Many years later he said, 'Before meeting Bhagavan I had decided not to bend before any human being because I thought that I was an avatar of the God Ganapati. Then, suddenly, I got this emotional feeling of *bhakti*. At once I thought of the boy in Virupaksha Cave.'

This newly discovered spirit of devotion impelled him towards Virupaksha Cave. Finding Bhagavan sitting on a bench outside the cave, he prostrated himself on the ground and caught hold of Bhagavan's feet. He crossed his arms so that his right hand would touch Bhagavan's right foot and his left hand the left foot.

Many years later, while I was sitting in Bhagavan's hall, I heard Ganapati Muni explain, 'If I had not crossed my hands, my left hand would have caught Bhagavan's right foot. This according to the *sastras*, would have been wrong.'

After introducing himself Ganapati Muni explained his problem to Bhagavan: 'I have read all the *sastras*, performed *japa* of the famous mantras, observed hundreds of penances and austerities. Yet I have had no realisation. Is my *tapas* tainted? I am said to be a learned man, yet I do not know. I take refuge in you. Help me!'

After gazing at him in silence for some time, Bhagavan gave his answer: 'If one observes that from which the "I-I" rises, the mind will subside there. That is *tapas*.'

Ganapati Muni immediately replied, 'Cannot the same result be obtained through mantra *japa* as well?'

Bhagavan answered, 'If, while one is doing *japa* of a mantra, one observes where the sound of that mantra rises from, the mind will subside there. That is *tapas*.'

The books that recount this incident all say that there was only one question and one answer, but Bhagavan himself told me that the account given above is the correct one.[18]

[18] This version is in accord with Bhagavan's standard way of dealing with questioners who asked him about their *sadhana*. He would first ask them to follow the practice of self-enquiry. If it subsequently became clear from the response to this suggestion that the questioner was attached to a different form of *sadhana*, Bhagavan would advise him or her to continue with his preferred method, saying that it would ultimately lead to an enquiry into the source and origin of the 'I'.

Ganapati Muni, completely satisfied with the answer, immediately accepted Bhagavan as his Guru, even though, prior to that day, he had been determined not to accept any human being as his Guru. Who can fully comprehend the power of the grace that must have been shining spontaneously through Bhagavan on this occasion? If even a person as great as Ganapati Muni had to take refuge in Bhagavan in order to learn the true nature of *tapas*, it should be clear that ordinary devotees must also submit to the Guru if they desire Self-realisation.[19]

Visions and *Siddhis*

Even though Sri Ramana indicated the truth by ever abiding in the Self as pure awareness, he has, at the same time appeared to many in their visions as God incarnate.

Lord Krishna assured his devotees: 'As I am shining as the Self in the hearts of all beings, in whatever form I am worshipped, I bless the devotees in that very same form.'

Even today Lord Krishna showers his grace on his devotees through whatever form they conceive him to be.

In the same way Sri Ramana has also appeared in visions as Lord Subramaniam and as *Sadguru* to his devotees. He has showered his grace in these visions by giving the recipients spiritual instruction as well as by fulfilling their desires. The following story of a lady devotee who came from Poland for Sri Bhagavan's *darshan* should serve as a good example. She once went alone to see Skandashram and on the way started feeling thirsty.

Not finding any way of quenching her thirst, she began to think, 'If it is true that Sri Bhagavan is the omnipotent, universal Self, why can't he appear here and remove my thirst?'

The very next moment Sri Bhagavan appeared there with water in his water pot and satisfied her thirst. When this manifestation took place Bhagavan was sitting in the ashram, in his usual place, completely unaware of the drama that was unfolding on the hill. The Polish lady, who had both pure love

[19] This section, 'The Necessity of Grace', has been assembled from several sources: a brief account in part eight of *Sri Ramana Darshanam*, a transcript of a conversation that Sadhu Natanananda had with Sadhu Om in the late 1970s, and the accounts in *Bhagavan and Nayana* and *Self-Realization* that deal with Ganapati Muni's visit to Bhagavan.

and devotion, was a devout Christian who had the tendency of only believing that a person was Christ-like if he exhibited supernatural powers. The supremely compassionate Bhagavan, caught by her devotion, appeared before her in conformity with her outlook and fulfilled her wish. Although incidents like these are a great help in increasing and intensifying the devotion and faith of devotees of various temperaments, Bhagavan generally discouraged people from deliberately trying to produce such phenomena.

There is no connection between *siddhis* [supernatural powers] and miracles like the one mentioned above. *Siddhis* are attained by effort, are performed with a sense 'I am doing this' and hence are limited. On the other hand, incidents such as these are solely due to the power of the divine that dwells in all, and it is reflected from within according to the outlook of the devotees. It is unlimited.

There were some people who regarded Sri Ramana as their *ishta devata* [chosen form of God] and expected him to fulfill all their desires. But Bhagavan, who accepted only true devotion as an offering, used to warn such boon seekers, 'There are no *siddhis* available in this place. So do not wait here expecting to get them and then be disappointed.'

On other occasions Bhagavan warned devotees that a desire for *siddhis* was an impediment on the spiritual path:

> If an aspirant treading on the path of liberation develops a liking for *siddhis*, his ego will wax and hence his bondage will become denser.
> Absolute stillness of mind is alone the attainment of liberation. This being so, tell me how can those who yoke their mind to *siddhis*, which are unobtainable without mental efforts, drown in the bliss of liberation, which is the complete cessation of mental activities?
> The attainment of the primal Self, the knowledge of liberation – this alone is the true *jnana siddhi* [accomplishment of *jnana*]. All the other eight types of *siddhis* belong merely to the wavering mind and its power of imagination.[20]

[20] *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham* v. 16 and *Guru Vachaka Kovai* vv. 222, 224. The eight types of *siddhis* (such as levitation and making the body as small or as large as one desires) are cited in many yoga texts.

Service to the Guru

Sri Bhagavan took special interest in the spiritual welfare of those intimate devotees who were spending their time in serving him with the belief that service to the Guru is the best form of *tapas*. Sri Bhagavan felt that the aim of serving him was that devotees' minds, immersed in outside work, should slowly withdraw from attending to the non-Self and attend to the Self. He felt that the ultimate aim of the devotees must be to become one with him through the method described by Manikkavachagar: 'Approaching and approaching, getting worn into an atom, and finally merging with him.'

In order to explain this he would use every opportunity as a pretext to teach and often say, pointing to his body, 'You are believing this false form to be my true form. If you regard this spurious Ramana as the *Sadguru* you will be disappointed when it disappears at the end of its life! Do not blame me then. I have said what needs to be said. It is left to you either to remember this or to ignore it in the future.'

Some of the devotees coming to the ashram from far off places to spend their holidays had a tendency to engage in ashram service. They were always directing their attention towards various activities. They would seize even the smallest opportunity to get immersed in activities throughout the day. They felt satisfied that such service would alone be sufficient for their salvation. Whenever Bhagavan happened to notice their attitude, he would refer to them by saying:

'In the name of service to the Guru, they should not waste their time in activities and become disappointed later. Such people will have cause to regret their ignorance in their last days. One should not forget, even for a moment, the aim of *satsang*. Having the belief that residence in the ashram will make realisation, which is most difficult to achieve in other places, easy to attain, one should always remain intent upon the realisation of one's true nature. There is no meaning in people who are not interested in that [Self-realisation] taking this place to be a special place. The spiritual service that devotees render to themselves by exerting themselves on the spiritual path for the attainment of their goal – that alone is sacred service to the Guru.'

Through these words he made it clear that he could not be

pleased by anything other than stilling the mind. The real benefit of coming to him was the subsidence of the mind. Because of this, he would exhort devotees to try to attend to the Self all the time.[21]

Some of the permanent residents of the ashram would make themselves responsible for ashram activities and, without realising their own defects, would then complain that they had no time for meditation.

Referring to those seeking cessation of activities, Sri Bhagavan would remark humourously, 'Is it that you have got no time for meditation? Or is it that you are unable to remain quiet? If you can remain quiet, go ahead and do so! You will then see how all the ashram activities go on naturally of their own accord. If you do this you will be astonished to discover that the help you receive for your own *tapas* will be more than the help you are rendering for other people's *tapas*.'

In this way Sri Bhagavan would point out in a dignified way their immaturity whenever the occasion arose.

A gentleman from the West was once sweeping up the leaf plates that were lying outside the ashram dining room. Sri Bhagavan, who happened to come there at that time, asked the devotee what his aim was in undertaking that act.

The devotee replied, 'Since my arrival at the ashram, till today, I have not had any opportunity to render any service in the ashram. Thinking that I may get redeemed by performing at least this humble act, which no one else performed, I decided to do this.'

Bhagavan told him, 'Is sweeping the used leaf plates the means to get salvation? Is it to perform this *tapas* that you have come here all the way from abroad. Go! Go! Enough of doing this kind of service! Go inside, sit to one side, turn your mind inward and find out he who wants to be saved. The service of purifying

[21]Kunju Swami, who served as Bhagavan's attendant for several years, recorded similar comments by Bhagavan:

'It is no use saying to oneself, "I am doing personal service to Sri Bhagavan. I am dusting his bed. I have served him for so many years." In addition to serving the Guru physically, it is also important to follow the path shown by the Guru. The best service to the Guru is engaging in *vichara* [enquiry], *dhyana* [meditation] and other practices with a purity of body, speech and mind.' (*Enadu Ninaivugal*, section 4.39.)

your heart is alone the highest service. That alone can truly redeem you.'

In this way Bhagavan explained the truth of *tapas* to him.

Physical service to the Guru has always been highly esteemed, as the following two verses show:

> The ancient scriptures proclaim that those who have served a *jivanmukta* are deemed to have fulfilled all the vows to please Siva, Brahma and Vishnu, and have made their birth blessed.
> O Supreme! If you make me fit to serve your devotees, the state of bliss will automatically be attained by me.[22]

When such statements extol service to the great ones, what is the meaning of Sri Bhagavan's remarks that imply that the time spent in service is wasted?

Service rendered with devotion to the great ones is also performed with an eye on the result. Its purpose is salvation, which can be obtained by the gracious look of the Guru. But the Guru's grace is earned by inner *tapas* and not by services rendered outside. Only worshipping the Self is worshipping the Guru. Service to the Guru in the form of reflecting on one's true nature can be performed at all places and at all times. All one needs for this service is earnestness and devotion.

Touching Bhagavan's Feet and Prostrating to Him

A certain lady who had a lot of devotion performed a traditional ritual for worshipping sages whenever she came into Bhagavan's presence to have *darshan*. She would prostrate to Bhagavan, touch his feet and then put the hands that had touched Bhagavan's feet on her eyes.

After noticing that she did this daily, Bhagavan told her one day, 'Only the Supreme Self, which is ever shining in your heart as the reality, is the *Sadguru*. The pure awareness, which is shining as the inward illumination "I", is his gracious feet. The contact with these [inner holy feet] alone can give you true redemption. Joining the eye of reflected consciousness [*chitabhasa*], which is your sense of individuality [*jiva bodha*], to those holy feet, which are the real consciousness, is the union

[22] *Kaivalyam*, 1.95, Thayumanavar, *Paraparakkanni*, v. 155.

of the feet and the head that is the real significance of the word "*asi*".[23] As these inner holy feet can be held naturally and unceasingly, hereafter, with an inward-turned mind, cling to that inner awareness that is your own real nature. This alone is the proper way for the removal of bondage and the attainment of the supreme truth.'

Some of those who came for Maharshi's *darshan* used to perform *ashtanga namaskaram*[24] in the traditional way. It was their belief that this practice, done devoutly, was indispensable for those who wanted the grace of the *Sadguru*.

In order to drive home the point that in spiritual life mere mechanical observance of any *sadhana*, without knowing its inner meaning and without experiencing its fruit, will not make one blessed, Sri Bhagavan, addressing one such devotee, said, 'The benefit of performing *namaskaram* to the Guru is only the removal of the ego. This is not attained except by total surrender. Within the Heart of each devotee the gracious Guru is giving *darshan* in the form of consciousness. To surrender is to offer fully, in silence, the subsided ego, which is a name-and-form thought, to the *aham-sphurana* [the effulgence of "I"], the real holy feet of the gracious Guru. Since [this is so], Self-realisation cannot be attained by a bowing of the body, but only by a bowing of the ego.'

In this way Sri Bhagavan explained the truth of *namaskaram* and further explained that if spiritual practices are to yield their fruits without fail, they should be observed with a full awareness of their purpose. The purpose and significance of *namaskaram* is revealed by Bhagavan in the following verses:

> The significance of the imperfect *jiva's namaskaram*,
> when he places his proud head beneath the feet of the

[23] This refers to the *mahavakya 'tat tvam asi'* (you are that). *Asi* means 'are'. Bhagavan's metaphor indicates that the inner state of being is revealed when individuality is merged in the 'holy feet' of pure consciousness.

[24] *Ashtanga*, means 'with eight limbs' and *namaskaram* is a physical gesture of respect. In *ashtanga namaskaram* one prostrates full-length on the ground with the hands above the head. Eight parts of the body – two legs, two arms, two ears, the forehead and the chin – must touch the ground, although not all at the same time. Since it is not physically possible to put both ears on the ground at the same time, the head is rotated until all the four prescribed 'head-limbs' have touched the ground.

> Guru or God, is that his ego sense, 'I am the body', is to be crushed by Self-knowledge.
> The great delusion caused by the ignorant ego creates the sense of separateness, which conceives differences such as Guru and disciple, Siva and *jiva*, and so on. The most meaningful *namaskaram* that one should make towards one's Guru is the attainment in oneself of the state of silence in which such a state of separateness never arises.[25]

The Guru's *Prasad*

According to Sri Mular[26] liberation can be attained by taking the *ucchistam* [the food that remains on the plate at the end of a meal] from meals eaten by the realised. Without realising the inner meaning of such statements on *ucchistam*, some who believed that *ucchistam* alone was the Guru's grace used to arrange for *bhiksha*. They would fast with devotional fervour and wait for the leaf-plate on which Bhagavan had taken his meals. Those devotees who had special faith in this practice used to fix their turn beforehand so that none would get disappointed. In order to demolish this meaningless belief of devotees who, without realising the truth of the Guru's *prasad*, were fasting for the fake *ucchistam*, Sri Bhagavan once remarked:

'To be blessed by the great ones with the experience of the Self, that alone is receiving the grace-filled *prasad*. This [experience of the Self] is the inner consciousness that is the natural experience of the great ones who shine with unlimited contentment as the divine Self. Even if one gets a little of this ambrosia, which is very difficult to obtain, at that very moment one will obtain, as a direct experience, unlimited peace of mind. If one leaves this [state or experience], and if one remains content to accept only offerings such as rice, sacred ash, fruits and flowers as the Guru's *prasad*, this will only lead to disappointment.'[27]

[25] *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, vv. 207, 310.

[26] Tirumular, the author of *Tirumantiram*, a canonical work of the South Indian branch of Saivism.

[27] Since the Tamil word for disappointment also conveys the idea of cheating, this sentence also implies that one is cheating oneself if one accepts only material offerings as the Guru's *prasad*.

After explaining the truth of the Guru's *prasad* in this way, Sri Bhagavan beamed his divine look on all present and blessed them by immersing them in a sea of brahmic bliss.

Sri Bhagavan indicated that one could partake of his true *ucchistam* by either offering the identification with the body to him or by immediately experiencing the true import of his gracious words:

> The enlightening words of instruction that come from the Guru's own Self-realisation are *ucchistam*. The correct way to partake of his *ucchistam* is for the disciple to abide silently as the Self as soon as he hears them. The ego is the identification with the body as 'I'. When this is offered to the Silent Guru, who is the Supreme Whole, the disciple attains the Self. Eating the Guru's *ucchistam* is the experience of that which then remains shining in the Heart.[28]

If this cannot be accomplished, we should at least have the satisfaction of knowing that the *jnani's* mere presence among us is at least sanctifying us and removing our defects:

> It is said that the mere life on earth of a great *jnani*, who ever revels in being, is itself the extremely pure *ucchistam* of God that will remove all the sins of the world.[29]

Initiation and *Upadesa*

The transmission from Guru to disciple of sacred syllables [mantras], *mahavakyas*, *mudras* [gestures] and imagined symbols is described in the sacred lore as initiation into knowledge [*jnana diksha*]. Also, in many monastic traditions functioning in the name of ancient Gurus, *upadesas* [short verbal teachings] of various kinds are given as a form of initiation. Having been accustomed to associate *upadesa* with such initiatory practices, almost everyone who approached Sri Bhagavan wanted very much to get some special *upadesa* from him. Sri Bhagavan gave one such seeker who sought outward *upadesa* on the supreme state the following reply:

[28] *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, vv. 301–2.

[29] *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, v. 303.

'*Jnana* is given neither from outside nor from another person. It can be realised by each and everyone in his own Heart. The *jnana* Guru of everyone is only the Supreme Self that is always revealing its own truth in every Heart through the existence-consciousness "I am, I am". The granting of true knowledge by him is initiation into *jnana*. The grace of the Guru is only that Self-awareness that is one's own true nature. It is the inner consciousness by which he is unceasingly revealing his existence. This divine *upadesa* is always going on naturally in everyone. As this *upadesa* alone is what reveals the natural attainment of the Self through one's own experience, the mature ones need at no time seek the help of external beings for *jnana upadesa*. The *upadesa* obtained from outsiders in forms such as sounds, gestures and thoughts are all only mental conceptions. Since the meaning of the word *upadesa* (*upa* + *desam*) is only "being in the Self" or "being as the Self", and since this is one's own real nature, so long as one is seeking the Self from outside, Self-realisation cannot be attained. Since you are yourself the reality that is shining in the Heart as the being-consciousness, abide always as a *sthita prajna* [one who is established in wisdom] having thus realised your own true nature. This firm abidance in the experience of the Self is described in the *Upanishads* by such terms as "the import of the *mahavakyas*", "Supreme silence", "Being still", "Quiescence of mind", and "Attainment of one's true nature".'

Although this was the normal method adopted most of the time by Sri Bhagavan for bestowing grace, as an exception he also once imparted a mantra to a harijan devotee. This devotee, who was worshipping Sri Bhagavan with great devotion as his *jnana* Guru, used to have his *darshan* every day from a distance, in conformity with the prevailing social customs.[30] Sri Bhagavan, who had noticed this for many days, called to him and asked him to come near.

Melting with great compassion because of his wonderful devotion, Sri Bhagavan gave him a gracious look and told him, 'Always keep meditating "Siva, Siva". Never forget this even in your dreams. This itself will make you blessed.'

[30] There was no rule prohibiting outcastes (harijans) from approaching Bhagavan. However, since many Hindu temples at that time refused to admit outcastes, this particular devotee probably assumed that such a rule was also in force at Sri Ramanasramam.

Good Conduct

Sri Bhagavan rarely gave out instructions on what he expected from devotees in the way of good character or good behaviour. But on the few occasions that he did openly give out such advice, he always did so in a very humble way. Devotees tended to regard Bhagavan as their mother, father, Guru and God, but he never took advantage of this position to interfere with their individual freedom. Instead of lecturing people on the necessity of virtuous behaviour, he preferred to demonstrate it by his own impeccable conduct.

Bhagavan felt that *sadhus* should have no desires. By living a life of spartan simplicity, Bhagavan demonstrated to devotees that it was necessary for them to reduce their consumption of inessential items and to give up ostentatious behaviour. I can give two examples of this from my own experience. A rich devotee once gave a very-good-quality fountain pen as an offering to the Guru, thinking that it would be useful in his writing work. Without even thinking about this pen, Sri Bhagavan was writing as usual with an ordinary pen. When a devotee noticed that he had to shake the pen frequently to remove the obstruction to the flow of ink, he reminded Sri Bhagavan about the new pen and told him that it would not pose any such inconvenience.

With an attitude of holy indifference Sri Bhagavan replied, 'The purpose of the pen is only writing. For that this [pen] is sufficient. It is true that since the ink in it is not flowing properly it needs to be shaken frequently and closed [when not in use]. However, it is good to have the habit of completing all important works immediately with whatever ordinary instruments are easily available. If we look at [likely] inconveniences, it will not be possible to complete any task in the allotted time. The happiness there is in simplicity can never be found in ostentation.'

In this way he made it known that he was quite content with the ordinary old pen. On another occasion Sri Bhagavan was found collecting the proof sheets of an ashram publication and making them into a book. A rich devotee, who was in the habit of throwing proof sheets away, even if the contents were of great value, felt that Bhagavan's efforts were unnecessary.

He approached him and said, 'When I come here next week I shall bring a beautifully bound copy of the book'.

Immediately Sri Bhagavan replied with a smile, 'Why is that necessary? Whatever matter is there in the beautiful book is also in this. What we need is only the contents. The price given for the new book is paid only for its beauty.'

In this way he indicated to the devotee that for him old and new were just the same.

All aspects of Sri Bhagavan's external life were of this same simple nature. In his early years at Arunachala he only ate food that automatically came to him. His dress was only an old loincloth. Shelter was only caves and deep pits. His bed was only the shade of trees or the bare earth. Thus he was living blissfully in solitude. It is true that in his latter days his life appeared to have all the comforts. However, all this was brought about by his devotees.

Sannyasa Dharma

Sri Bhagavan took a special interest in young *sadhus* who had taken the vow of unbroken *brahmacharya*. He was keen that they should not become victims of the belief, held by some women, that they would get good sons by associating with great ones. A lady of this kind once approached Sri Bhagavan with a non-spiritual motive, but her desire was not fulfilled. After many visits she became a devotee and lost her original desire. Bhagavan was commenting on this incident when he made the following remarks:

'*Brahmacharya* really means meditation on *Brahman*; it does not merely mean "remaining celibate". The discipline of true *brahmacharya* deserves to be observed by everyone. For those who observe it, it is important that they do not swerve from the *dharma* of their respective *asramas*.[31] It is easy to put on the appearance of *brahmacharya* but to adhere to it to the end is very difficult. It is only fit for courageous and mature people endowed with intense detachment. It is therefore necessary for those who are observing unbroken *brahmacharya* to be always extremely careful and vigilant in associating with women and in craving for sense pleasures. The various moral teachings in the *Puranas* that relate stories about the downfall, and the

[31] Four stages of life, called *asramas*, are observed by traditional Hindus. Each one has its own code of conduct or '*dharma*'.

dangerous consequences of such falls, of some people, including vedic *rishis*, are object lessons for all of us.'

Bhagavan expected his *sadhu* devotees to remain aloof from all the attractions of the world. If he saw them slipping from this state he would immediately correct them. This happened on one occasion when a maharaja, who had come for Bhagavan's *darshan*, was leaving the ashram. A *sadhu* from the ashram followed the maharaja for some distance and then returned.

Looking at him with a smile Sri Bhagavan said, 'Swami seems to have gone on some urgent business! There may be some special reason for that maharaja, who possesses the eight forms of wealth, to come seeking you,[32] but why did you, who should be a person exemplifying contentment of mind, go after him? If ever you have any wants, is he the one who can remove them? Without knowing even this simple truth, for what purpose have you embraced renunciation?'[33]

Through such instructions Sri Bhagavan explained that desirelessness is the hallmark of *sannyasa*. A *sannyasin* should have the firm faith that the Lord, who is the all-powerful one, is the protector of *sadhus*, and that he alone can confer all that is needed on all those in need. With such total faith in the protection of the Lord, *sannyasins* should totally surrender themselves to the Lord.

The saint Appar has graphically described the consequences of true surrender:

> Because we have surrendered ourselves to the Lotus Feet of Sankara [Siva], who himself is subject to none, we are subjects of none. We do not fear death, we shall not suffer in hell, we shall not be liars, we have known no disease, we shall not bow to anyone and we shall always be happy. For us there is no sorrow.

[32] According to a footnote in the original Tamil text, the word 'you' refers to *sadhus* in general and not merely to the one whom Bhagavan was addressing.

[33] In telling this anecdote Sadhu Natanananda does not make it clear that the swami followed the maharaja in the hope of getting a donation from him. On two occasions when maharajas were leaving the ashram, a resident devotee followed in the hope of getting a donation for the ashram. On both occasions Bhagavan criticised these devotees. This story appears to be an account of one of these incidents.

There is a proverb, 'To a *sannyasin* even a king is mere straw'. Bhagavan upheld this view and once illustrated it by recounting the following story. A Muslim saint, learning that Emperor Akbar very much liked to associate with *sadhus*, went to the palace in order to obtain from the emperor a favour for his devotees. But he saw Akbar in the royal mosque, lost in prayers and asking favours from God. Suddenly a new realisation dawned upon the saint. Immediately he left the palace and went home. After completing his prayers Akbar heard about the visit of that saint and had him brought to his presence. Akbar asked him why, after coming to the palace, he left without seeing him.

To this the saint replied: 'To fulfil a small need of my devotees I approached you, the emperor. But I found that you yourself have some needs and that you were praying to God for their fulfilment. As this scene taught me the great truth that the all-powerful God alone can fulfil everyone's desire, I immediately left.' Saying this calmly, he left the palace.

After narrating this incident Sri Bhagavan explained that *sadhus* must totally surrender themselves to the Lord, that they must be without likes or dislikes, be free from thoughts and anxieties, and that they should obtain even their essential needs from God alone.

One night [in 1924] some thieves entered Sri Ramanasramam and were found breaking the glass panes of the windows.

Sri Bhagavan told the thieves with love, 'Why are you taking so much trouble to enter the room by breaking open the windows? We will open the doors for you to enter so that you can take whatever you want. We will not obstruct you in any way.' And then he had the doors opened.

Despite this the thieves physically abused Sri Bhagavan. A devotee who could not bear this wanted to retaliate.

Sri Bhagavan intervened and said, 'Patience! Patience! What kind of action is this? Before beginning an action should we not scrutinise the situation? They are thieves. They know nothing. They have taken theft as their profession. Will they be aware of good and evil? To achieve their ends they are prepared to do whatever is necessary. If we *sadhus* also repeat the very same evil acts of those who do not pay attention to right and wrong, what then is the difference between them and us? What will the world think of us?'

By such friendly advice he pacified him and explained that

sadhus should under no circumstances slip from their *sannyasa dharma*.

On another occasion a *sadhu* who found fault with the conduct of the ashram manager once lost his patience and was getting ready to indulge in violence. When Sri Bhagavan saw this he immediately intervened and physically prevented him from carrying out the act. He pointed out his mistake and then gave him the following kindly words of advice:

'My aim is not to interfere with your freedom. As it appeared that your act was excessive, for the sake of protecting *sannyasa dharma*, if not for your sake, I happened to intervene, much against my nature. I am not giving you any words of advice. As you are residing here, I am saying all this in an affectionate way. If there is anything good in these words, accept them. Elders have said that even the words of youngsters should be accepted if there is merit in them.'[34]

In this way Sri Bhagavan, through his kindly, sweet words, explained the nature of *sadhu dharma* and calmed the irate *sadhu*. From that day onwards the *sadhu* was totally transformed and became fortunate to worship Sri Bhagavan as God himself.

It should be noted that even when Sri Bhagavan was performing the unavoidable duty of stopping the improper act of a *sadhu* who had taken refuge in him, he did so in a supremely humble way. Bhagavan expected his *sadhu* devotees to display the same humility that he himself always did. On one occasion he explained why humility was so important for all those who were on the spiritual path.

'Since the only benefit of learning and other similar virtues is the attainment of humility, humility alone is the real ornament of the sages. It is the storehouse of all other virtues and is

[34] The *sadhu* was Dandapani Swami, one of the early ashram managers. Bhagavan, in keeping with the prevailing Hindu tradition, treated people who were older than himself with great respect. Since Dandapani Swami was a few years older than he was, he probably found it a little embarrassing to have to lecture him in this way. In another recorded instance of this story Bhagavan makes it clear in his comments to Dandapani Swami that he only intervened because he didn't want *sannyasins* to get a bad name:

'I am not interested in who wins your fight. That is not my concern. But both of you are wearing the orange robes of *sannyasins*. If one of you kills the other, *sannyasins* everywhere will get a bad name. So stop it.' (*Living By The Words Of Bhagavan*, 2nd ed., p. 120.)

therefore extolled as the wealth of divine grace. Although it is a characteristic befitting wise people in general, it is especially indispensable for *sadhus*.

'Since attaining greatness is impossible for anyone except by humility, all the disciplines of conduct such as *yama* and *niyama*,[35] which are prescribed specifically for aspirants on the spiritual path, have as their aim only the attainment of humility. Humility is indeed the hallmark of the destruction of the ego. Because of this, humility is especially extolled by *sadhus* themselves as the code of conduct befitting them.

'Moreover, for those who are residing at Arunachala, it is indispensable in every way. Arunachala is the sacred place where even the embodiments of God such as Brahma, Vishnu and Sakti humbly subsided. Since it has the power to humble even those who would not be humbled, those who do not humbly subside at Arunachala will surely not attain that redeeming virtue anywhere else. The Supreme Lord, who is the highest of the high, shines unrivalled and unsurpassed only because he remains the humblest of the humble. When the divine virtue of humility is necessary even for the Supreme Lord, who is totally independent, is it necessary to emphasise that it is absolutely indispensable for *sadhus* who do not have such independence? Therefore, just as in their inner life, in their outer life also *sadhus* should possess complete and perfect humility. It is not that humility is necessary only for devotees of the Lord, even for the Lord it is the characteristic virtue.'

Many teachers and devotees conceive God to be an omnipotent being who wields his power in the same way that a great emperor would. Bhagavan was unique in declaring not merely that God was humble, but that he qualified for his position as Supreme Lord by being the humblest of all beings:

> One's greatness increases to the extent that one becomes humble. The reason why God is supreme to such an extent that the whole universe bows to him is his sublime state of humility in which the deluded ego never rises unknowingly.
>
> For a wise aspirant who seeks to gain true greatness, it is best to do *namaskaram* to others until complete

[35] These are rules of behaviour. *Yama* rules govern one's relationship to society. *Niyama* rules cover personal behaviour.

> egolessness is achieved. On the other hand, it is indeed dangerous for him to accept homage from others.
> Is it not on account of his behaving so humbly, as one ever in the service of every creature, that God stands worthy of all the glorious worship ever performed by all the worlds? By seeing himself in all, by being humble even to devotees who bow to everyone, and by naturally remaining at such a pinnacle of meekness that nothing can be meeker than himself, the state of being supreme has come to the Lord.[36]

In such words as these Sri Bhagavan often advised his devotees that the possession of humility is the only sign of possessing grace, and that humility should be practised in all walks of life. He also said that those who are not humble cannot be *sadhus* even if they are intellectually superior. Although he was worshipped as God himself by everyone, Sri Bhagavan always demonstrated his own teachings on this subject by showing humility in all his activities.

The State of the *Jnani*

Only those whose minds have been destroyed are *jnanis*. Their state cannot be imagined since it transcends all thought. Because the activities of *jnanis*, who shine in their natural state as pure existence, are mere superimpositions that exist only in the minds of onlookers, it is not possible to investigate the behaviour of *jnanis* and come to any definite conclusions.

> The *jnani* has become one, tranquil and pure. To him ether and the rest [of the five elements] are the form of the Self. Whatever actions such a one has given up become prohibited actions. Whatever he undertakes becomes proper action.[37]

Sri Ramakrishna has said, 'Even if my Guru is one who frequents the toddy shop, I will not superimpose any blemish on him. Why? Because I know that he is not going to lose his Guru-nature simply because of that. I have not taken refuge in him to examine and investigate his external life. That also is

[36] *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, vv. 494-7.
[37] *Swarupa Saram* v. 96.

not my duty. Therefore, whatever happens, he alone is my Guru.'

Those who seek the help of the Maharshi with the aim of perfecting themselves in such supreme devotion should, like Sri Ramakrishna, accept that it is futile to examine the outward actions of *jnanis*.

Jnanis appear to perform various activities in the world, but this only appears to be so in the sight of onlookers. The *jnani* himself knows that he does nothing. Because people see *jnanis* moving and working in the world, it is widely believed that their actions are still governed by the workings of *prarabdha* karma.[38] Since Bhagavan occasionally appeared to endorse this idea, it is worth examining his view in some detail.

Towards the end of Bhagavan's life a devotee, who firmly believed in the omnipotence of the great ones, could not bear to see the Maharshi's body become weak because of the disease that was afflicting it. The devotee appealed to the Maharshi with great feeling that he should transfer the disease to him and stay in the body for some more time in order to save many other helpless devotees.

Wondering at the devotee's child-like innocence, Sri Bhagavan looked at him with compassion and replied graciously, 'Who created this disease? Is it not he alone who has the freedom to change it? Is it not enough that I have borne till today all by myself this load of flesh that [once it is dead] must be carried by four persons? Should I continue bearing it henceforth?'

Through these kind words he made clear that in the physical world the law of destiny was inexorable. The *jnani* realises that whatever is to happen at whatever time in whichever way, it will certainly happen at those times and in those ways. The *jnani*, who has no right to alter any of these events, merely remains as a witness established in the natural state.

Although Bhagavan knew that he was the unmanifest Self, and that as such he was unaffected by destiny, he often made

[38] *Prarabdha* karma is the script of all the actions that one is destined to perform in this life. Bhagavan was a strict determinist, often saying that all the actions that one performs in one's life are determined prior to one's birth, and that the only freedom one has is to not be identified with the body that is carrying them out. However, as Sadhu Natanananda explains in the subsequent discussion, if one knows that one is the Self, then one has no *prarabdha* or destiny.

comments that appeared to indicate that the *jnani* was somehow constrained and governed by the workings of karma.

> The ordainer controls the fate of souls in accordance with their *prarabdha*. Whatever is not destined to happen will not happen, try as you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it. This is certain. Therefore, remaining silent is good.

These remarks, written by Bhagavan during his early years at Arunachala, were addressed to his mother. She wanted him to come back to Madurai, but Bhagavan indicated through these words that it was his destiny to stay at Arunachala. Many years later he made another statement about his personal *prarabdha*:

'Sometimes I think, "Without staying in one place and without making specific plans for the future, in keeping with the *dharma* of *sadhus*, who live like birds without any attachment, I feel that I should go wherever my legs take me and spend my time thus". But my *prarabdha* does not allow it. In spite of my efforts on many occasions, each time it [my *prarabdha*] creates some obstacle or other, and, without allowing me to go anywhere, it keeps me in this place itself. If one remains like this with a residence, property and attendants, then will not worldly activities arise? My *prarabdha* is like this!'

These remarks were made in the early years of his stay at the foot of the hill when a mischievous person, after pretending to be a devotee for some time, went to court and unjustly claimed ownership of the ashram and its properties.

These two statements appear to indicate that even a *jnani* cannot transcend destiny. However, Maharshi once took the opposite view when he wrote: 'Know that just as no wife will remain unwidowed when the husband dies, all the three karmas will become non-existent when the doer dies.'[39]

The truth behind these apparent contradictions is as follows: *prarabdha* exists for the one whose outlook is limited and

[39] *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*, v. 33. Apart from *prarabdha*, the other two karmas mentioned are *sanchita* and *agami*. *Sanchita* karma is the store of karma accumulated in previous lives that is not brought forward into the present birth. *Agami* karma is the new karma accumulated in the present life that has to be experienced in future lives.

restricted by identifications with the body and the mind, and it is absent for the one whose vision is free of such restricting limitations. These two different standpoints represent the views of the worldly and the realised respectively. *Prarabdha* karma affects only the body and the mind. The *jnani*, who exists only as the formless Self, has no body, no mind and no karma. He only appears to be governed by karma in the sight of those who identify him with the body and imagine that he has a mind. The *jnani* may sometimes say, 'I was destined to perform this action'. The ignorant, who identify him with a body, will assume that he performed the action because of his *prarabdha* karma. The *jnani*, who never identifies himself with any particular body, knows that *prarabdha* cannot touch the Self, which is his real nature.

The doubt, whether or not a *jnani* has *prarabdha*, arises only to the ignorant. The only way to eliminate all doubts about this matter is to destroy the ego. That is why Sri Bhagavan so frequently said that the removal of the ego would answer all questions.

Confusion about the real nature of the *jnani* often arises because the *jnani* frequently pretends to be in the same state as the people who approach him in order to resolve their problems. On one occasion, for example, the son of Ganapati Muni came to Sri Bhagavan and questioned him about the efficacy of the *sakti panchakshari* mantra [*Om Hrim Namasivaya*]. He had been given this mantra by his father and he had wanted to know if, as he had been told by his father, he could realise the Self by repeating it.

Bhagavan confirmed that this was possible by saying, 'This [mantra] is the means to liberation'.

The son then raised a further question: 'If that is so, are you also practising the same mantra?'

Sri Bhagavan had to say, 'Yes, yes, this [same mantra] only,' because the boy could not have understood the truth about the state of the *jnani*.

Sri Bhagavan never tired of telling devotees that he was not the body and that they should never identify him with a physical form. There is a well-known incident that illustrates this. A devotee once came to have Bhagavan's *darshan* for the first time. Sri Bhagavan, who was not in his usual seat, was engaged in some activities along with other devotees.

Not knowing that he was Bhagavan, this new devotee asked him, 'Where is Ramana?'

Immediately Sri Bhagavan replied with a smile, 'Ramana? See, he is here,' and pointed to a brass vessel on which the name Ramana had been engraved.

When Sri Bhagavan saw that the newcomer was puzzled by the remark, he pointed respectively to his body and the vessel and explained, 'This is also a form like that vessel. At least the name Ramana is on that. Even that is not here.'

And then he resumed his activity. The newcomer then understood the truth of Sri Bhagavan's remarks.

Since the *jnani* is not the body but the formless Self, the physical death of the body does not affect or change him in any way. This should be borne in mind when one considers the meaning of the light that appeared in the sky at the time of Bhagavan's death and which disappeared behind the mountain of Arunachala. Some people maintain that this bright light was Bhagavan's spirit, and that when it disappeared behind the mountain, it was finally merging with Arunachala. The following remarks of Sri Bhagavan about liberation, which uphold the advaitic doctrine that birth and death are illusory, contradict the views of those who connect the appearance of the light with his final absorption.

'When a *jnani* loses his individuality, at that very moment he has also lost his body. Just as no change occurs in the appearance of a snake when it casts off its slough, so also no change occurs in the Self-state of the *jivanmukta* [one who is liberated while still in the body] by the loss of *upadhis*.'[40]

Acharya Vinoba Bhave said something very similar about Bhagavan's physical death: 'It is said everywhere that Bhagavan Sri Ramana has left his body. Whatever anyone feels about his disembodiment, the truth is, at the very moment he renounced his ego, he also left the body.'

It should be clear from both of these statements that the light that appeared after Bhagavan's death cannot be taken as an indication of the union of the individual with *Brahman*.

Sri Bhagavan, firmly established in his knowledge of the Self,

[40] See footnote eight for a detailed explanation of *upadhis*. In this case '*upadhis*' refers to the physical body.

knew in advance that his physical death would be, quite literally, a non-event.

Shortly before he gave up the body he tried to explain to his devotees that, from the standpoint of the Self, nothing could ever happen to him or change him again.

He remarked, 'Thinking this body alone to be Bhagavan, they are grieved that Bhagavan is suffering because of illness. What to do? They are worried that Swami is going to leave. Where to go? How to go?'

Bhagavan's non-identification with the body was witnessed by all who saw him in the last few months of his life. During those last days, when Sri Bhagavan's body was affected by cancer, he remained indifferent to the treatments arranged by his devotees. He handed over his body to the care of the doctors since that was the wish of the devotees.

At that time he said, 'Our job is only to remain as a witness to all that happens. It is not to imagine this way or that way regarding anything.'

Following this dictum he remained to the very end as a mere witness, free from anxieties. When devotees found that there was no improvement in his condition, even after prolonged treatment, they became agitated. They wanted to know whether Sri Bhagavan would permit them to try a drastic method of treatment that had been prescribed by the doctors as a last resort.[41]

Sri Bhagavan replied, 'Why should you ask me all this? Was it I who asked for treatment? Was it not you alone who took the initiative in this? Ideas regarding what should happen and what should not happen occur only to you. I have no connection with this.' And then he kept quiet.

Sri Bhagavan remained ever established in the natural state as the Lord of Knowledge without the slightest attachment to any of the scenes of the three states that passed before him. He neither desired anything nor disliked anything. Although it was the practice to inform the Maharshi about all the activities that were going on in the ashram, he always remained as the one who knew nothing.

Sri Bhagavan has said, 'Just as odours do not attach

[41] This may be a reference to a recommendation that he have his arm amputated since none of the other surgical procedures had worked.

themselves to the ever-pure space, similarly, objects do not attach to the *jnani* who always sees only the Self. Therefore, only the state of *mauna* in which nothing is known is [the state of] pure knowledge.'

Jnanis never lose their Self-awareness and they never imagine that they are performing any actions. Just as the activities of nature, such as creation, which take place in the presence of the Lord, do not attach to him, so the worldly actions of devotees that take place in the presence of the *jnani* do not cling to him. The following two verses give some indication of these aspects of the *jnani's* state:

> In the waking state we shall witness the dance of the senses. In dream we shall see the dance of the mind. In thought-free sleep we shall perform the void-dance of non-existence while remaining as the exalted essence. As a hill of magnetic iron ore neither moves of itself nor puts things in motion, and yet pieces of iron orientate themselves towards it, I neither act by myself nor actuate others, and yet the whole world is active before me.[42]

This indeed is the experience of the *jivanmuktas*. Just as the attitude of the devotees gets reflected in the Lord, similarly, the attitudes of those who approach him get reflected in the *jnani*. Thus the *Brahma jnanis* [*jnanis* established in *Brahman*] who have the transcendental vision do not absorb anything, are not attached to anything and are not bound by anything.

Some authorities declare that the cessation of worries or anxieties constitutes liberation. Bhagavan once commented on this while he was explaining the true nature of liberation:

'What is meant by liberation? Do the heavenly worlds and heavenly bliss exist somewhere else in the sky? Are they to be experienced in some other world and some other body after leaving this world and the body? The Heart alone is the supreme world. Tranquility, in the form of supreme silence, is alone the supreme bliss or the happiness of liberation.

'The cessation of all worries is the attainment of the supreme truth. By the state of being-consciousness the great life of supreme bliss can be attained at all times in this very world and in this very body.'

[42] *Swarupa Saram,* v. 15 and *Kaivalyam,* v. 2.24.

Tiruvarut Selvam [The Wealth of Grace[43]]

54 By getting rid of oppressive attachments, 'I' died. What is now animating the body is being-consciousness, that which abides as my Lord.

68 Losing Self-awareness, I was chained in the body by the vile senses. I was liberated by consciousness that manifested in my Heart as the soul of my soul.

78 As desires ceased through the blessings of my Master, the mind, which was never previously satisfied, now attained fullness and completeness.

79 Having succeeded in getting the good fortune of practising devotion to the feet of the Lord in whom grace is abounding, the soul, which was merged in dark delusion, attained the Heart state.

80 To my eye of *jnana*, which has seen the truth, the Self appears everywhere. The illusory objects perceived by the senses, which I saw when I was deluded, no longer appear.

81 When the glittering sun appears, no stars are seen. Similarly, when my godliness arose, no thought appeared.

82 *Jnana* did not shine as long as the ego manifested. When the Self appeared, ego disappeared by itself.

85 By thinking without thought of the one [Bhagavan] who, like Arunachala, abides without movement, I sank into the Heart.

89 Appearing as the Guru outside and as consciousness within, he weeded out the illusory mind and revealed my real nature.

[43] These verses are taken from an unpublished 108-verse poem that Sadhu Natanananda wrote after Bhagavan passed away.

N. R. Krishnamurti Aiyer

N. R. Krishnamurti Aiyer was born in 1898 in a village near Tiruchirappalli, a large town located about a hundred miles south of Tiruvannamalai. He first heard about Bhagavan through Appachi Iyer, a maternal uncle who lived in Tiruvannamalai. For most of his working life he lived in Madurai, the city where Bhagavan had his death experience in 1896. He was a regular visitor to Ramanasramam in the 1920s, 30s and 40s. In Bhagavan's presence and through Bhagavan's grace he had a number of extraordinary experiences, many of which are recorded in this account.

It was in April 1914 that I first saw him. On our way to Tirupati my parents, uncles and their families halted in Tiruvannamalai. Our party of about twenty, including half a dozen youngsters, proceeded to Virupaksha Cave for Sri Bhagavan's *darshan*. I was then about fifteen years old. I made my obeisance to Bhagavan along with everyone else. Sri Bhagavan's benign and divine gaze was fixed upon me, but I paid little attention to him as I ran about the place along with the other boys. We found a good-sized, beautiful, white conch shell inside the cave and had a lot of fun blowing it. Nobody bothered to prevent us.

After my return home to Tiruchirappalli, where my father was practising as a lawyer, a great change came over me. Till then I had never cared to go to any temple, but now I felt dragged, as it were, by some mysterious fascination to the huge and magnificent Mathrubhuteswara Lingam in the rock temple in the centre of the city. I would go up the hill to see this *lingam* almost every evening. Once inside the temple, a great peace overwhelmed me and the joy I felt was indescribable. All the same I was, as usual, keenly interested in my academic work and successfully finished my high school studies in April 1915.

When I entered college a further change came over me. This was noticeable during the weekly hour for English composition in the classroom. The tutor would announce the subject for composition as soon as the class assembled. Every student, except me, would finish his composition during the hour. I would just

write the subject heading on the paper, sit statue-like for the whole hour, and then hand over the blank sheets to the tutor. No ripple of thought could cross my mind during this period. I was fully conscious, but my mind was immobile, like a block of stone. I simply could not muster the thoughts even for a few lines, however much I tried.

These states persisted for the two years of my Intermediate classes. Even today it is a wonder to me how I passed the Intermediate examination with just a few marks short of a first, a feat that enabled me to secure a coveted seat in the BA Honours course. I had to take physics, even though my original desire was to take English Literature. That could not be, as I had done poorly in English, getting just a pass mark. Judged from this distance of time, it seems that I lost the ability to write original thoughts, a skill much needed in English, though the capacity to remember and repeat facts taken from books was not much impaired.

It was rough sailing during the years of my physics honours course. My efforts to study books brought on a severe ache inside my brain. I would seek relief by closing my eyes and lying still for most of the time I was not in class. I still wonder how I got my yearly promotions. It must have been due to the kindness of my sympathetic professor, through whom Sri Bhagavan's grace must have operated.

In January 1919 I had occasion to visit my sister's house in Tiruvannamalai. The very morning I arrived there from Tiruchirappalli I had *darshan* of Sri Bhagavan at Skandashram. This time also Sri Bhagavan's gracious look was impressed upon me. Returning to my sister's house after *darshan*, I lay down to sleep after breakfast. It was not an ordinary sleep. For over two hours I was fully conscious, but at the same time totally unconscious of my body and its surroundings. It was only with great difficulty that I was roused for lunch. Even after being roused, I felt that everything around me was like a dream. Of course, the people around me saw my puzzled expression and made fun of me.

After my return to Tiruchirappalli, I slowly recovered my ability to study, but even so, I had to extend my three-year course to four years. Eventually, when I did take the BA Honours degree examination in 1921, I was lucky enough to get the second rank in the university lists.

After I graduated I initially thought that I would study law

but when I was offered a job teaching physics I immediately accepted. I started my career as an assistant professor of physics in the American College at Madurai in 1922 and worked there for about thirty-three years in the company of both American and Indian teachers. I finally retired as professor and head of the physics department, in which capacity I served for twelve years up to 1955.

During the summer vacation at the end of the first year of my teaching career, I visited my sister. She was married to a man called Kuppuswami Iyer and they both lived in Tiruvannamalai. During that visit I had *darshan* of both Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni and Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi.

Ganapati Muni was then living in Mango Tree Cave on the hill, a place already sanctified by the residence of the Maharshi. One afternoon I, along with my friend T. K. Sundaresa Iyer and my brother-in-law Kuppuswami Iyer, went and saw Ganapati Muni. Sri T. K. Sundaresa Iyer had told me how, with himself as secretary, Ganapati Muni had organised a Mahendra Sanga with about ten thousand members all over India to perform mantra *japas, homas* [vedic rituals] and other spiritual practices for the emancipation of India from British rule. Ganapati Muni was then affectionately addressed as 'Nayana' [father] by all his followers. Because I had heard many favourable things about him, I approached Nayana in a most respectful manner.

He was seated in front of the cave. I saw in him a majestic figure, like that of a Grecian statue. His face was wreathed in the most enchanting smile, like that of a dear mother. We prostrated before Nayana and I was duly introduced to him. As I started speaking with him, he listened with a look of great intellectual avidity to the latest ideas about space, time and matter, just making a few interjections once in a while. I finished by saying that everything resolves itself into a space-time continuum in which there is a continuous transformation of tiny particles into energy and vice versa, according to certain specific laws. Nayana asked me how, without an intelligence acting at every point, the cosmos could endure as such without ending in chaos. I then had to admit the universe to be a continuum of consciousness in which space-time and all objects, from the stars to the electrons, were compelled to function according to certain specific laws. Solidity of all objects, I told

him, was only an illusion since the volume of the particles constituting a body was negligibly small compared to the volume of the whole body, even as the stars taken together formed a very negligible part of the volume of the whole universe of infinite space. I told him that I had concluded from my studies that the world picture of shadowy forms was held on an infinite screen of pure consciousness.

At this stage of the discussion Sri Ganapati Muni exclaimed '*Chitram! Chitram!*' [Picture! Picture!]. The words, like mystic mantras, had a magical effect on me. That very instant, for a brief eternity, my body disappeared and *I was that screen of consciousness holding the world picture!*

We prostrated at the feet of this great master of mantra *sastras* [mantra scriptures] and took leave of him. His word was a mantra and his very breath a benediction unto the whole world.

At that time I was very sympathetic towards people like Ganapati Muni who were working towards the political uplift of India. I also felt anger towards people like Bhagavan who were not lifting a finger for the country's liberation. Before I met Bhagavan that year I had made it my business to pick a fight with anyone who neglected the practicalities of life in favour of mere discussions on the existence of God.

Because of this attitude I had told my companions that I would not prostrate before the Maharshi, but when I saw him a strange thing happened: the instant we reached his presence I fell flat on my face in the traditional mode of prostration. This spontaneous gesture embarrassed me a little since I knew that my companions were aware of my attitude.

In a belated attempt to regain my composure I gazed steadily at the Maharshi and tried to engage him in a philosophical discussion.

'You are now sitting like this,' I asked, 'but what is your next state?'

I wanted to know what he thought about life after death. My idea was to elicit from him the reply that there is a soul that survives the dissolution of the body, that later gets unified with the oversoul or God. I wanted to have a verbal fight with him so that I could prove that this was not so. Minutes passed but no reply was forthcoming. There was absolute silence as two pairs of eyes were interlocked in a mutual, steady gaze.

A thought arose within me, 'Is this man taking shelter in silence to avoid answering an inconvenient question?'

Just then Sri Bhagavan's ringing voice exploded, 'You said state. What do you mean by state?'

If a bombshell had exploded under my seat, it could not have been as shattering as this sudden counter question, most unexpectedly delivered. I felt I had to answer him.

I began to think: 'Well, I did not ask him about the body that will be buried or burnt. There is something inside the body, the thinking apparatus, the so-called mind. It is about this that I asked. Now, if I say that the question is about the state of mind, he will naturally ask me to define mind, so I must have the answer ready for such a question.'

So, within myself, I raised the enquiry 'What is mind?' But no answer was forthcoming. My mind was paralysed, its thought power dead. I was like a helpless mute. There was a fierce glow in Sri Bhagavan's eyes that held my own eyes in a tight grip. Then a radiant smile of victory spread over his divine face. I lost awareness of both the body and the world as the insignificant 'I' was swallowed up in the pure Awareness-Being in which all names, forms, time, space and action are utterly lost. It was a state of utter silence without beginning or end, aglow with the self-effulgent 'I am'. When I recovered consciousness of my body and its surroundings, with the inner glow still effulgent, there were no more questions to be asked or answered. Revelling in the joy of that thrilling defeat, I quickly prostrated and made a headlong flight.

Before proceeding further I should like to record my impressions of the institution of Sri Ramanasramam, just then started at the foot of the Arunachala hill, where the mortal remains of Azhagammal [Bhagavan's mother] were interred during the summer of the year 1922. The last days of the Mother were spent in Skandashram, which was built on the eastern slope of the hill. When the Mother died, Kavyakantha, who was an authority on Hindu *sastras*, declared that a *mukta purusha* [liberated person] should not be cremated but instead should be enshrined in a *samadhi* with a consecrated Siva *lingam* duly installed on top of it. Accordingly, the Mother's body was laid to rest in an underground chamber of brick and mortar in a sack filled with scented *vibhuti* and camphor. After depositing the sack and its precious contents, the chamber was filled

completely with further quantities of *vibhuti* and sealed with a slab of granite over which was installed a Siva *lingam* that was given the name Mathrubutheswara [Siva manifesting as mother]. The Siva *lingam* was deemed to be God Siva himself, and daily worship was started at the *samadhi*. This worship, started in 1922, has been continued till this day in 1986 [the year when Krishnamurti Aiyer wrote most of this account]. It will be continued for all time to come.

It is relevant to ask why the Maharshi left Skandashram to take up permanent residence at the foot of the hill.

In the last few years of her life Bhagavan's mother came and lived with her son at Skandashram. After a few years Bhagavan's younger brother, Niranjanananda Swami [Chinnaswami], also came to live there. By that time a number of *sadhus* had joined the ashram as Maharshi's disciples. Not all of them were of a desirable type. An aggressive type of leadership developed among them that Bhagavan did not care to curb or correct. They claimed proprietary rights over the ashram and its contents. After Bhagavan's mother's death they even forbade Niranjanananda Swami from taking fuel, food material, etc. for the Mother's *puja* that was conducted daily at her *samadhi*. Every morning poor Niranjanananda Swami, with the help of devoted *sadhus* like Kunju Swami, had to beg in town for the needs of the daily *puja*. He would perform *puja* himself before returning to Skandashram in the evening to spend the night there. This went on for some time.

One morning, a few months after his mother died, Bhagavan left Skandashram for good and came to stay in the hut that had been erected over the Mother's *samadhi*. This event is vividly described by Kunju Swami in his fascinating book of reminiscences.

When I had Bhagavan's *darshan* after first seeing Ganapati Muni, I noticed that the whole area of the present ashram was a jungle overgrown with cacti and shrubs that were full of thorns. A small area around the *samadhi* had been cleared and a thatched shed had been erected over it. I also remember that there was an open-air kitchen. At the time I arrived on this visit Sri Bhagavan was seated on the bench under a tree. A dog that was lying on the bench was being fondly stroked on the head by Sri Bhagavan. Later on that dog attained *mukti* [liberation] by

the grace of Sri Bhagavan and is now enshrined in a *samadhi* close to that of the cow Lakshmi.[1]

When I arrived lunch was under preparation. A tall well-built *sadhu* in a loincloth was preparing rice and *sambar* over a stove improvised from three blocks of granite. One big vessel with boiled rice was ready, another big vessel was on the fire, and *sambar* was being prepared. Aubergines about the size of a tennis ball, cut simply into halves, were being cooked to a consistent degree of softness by being boiled in the *sambar*. Because they were only being cooked for a short time, they did not lose their shape. The *sambar*, which was almost ready, emitted a very pleasant and appetising smell. Two other visitors and I were invited to partake of the lunch. Including Sri Bhagavan, *sadhus* and visitors, we were about a dozen people. In the open air, on leaf plates put on the bare ground, two courses of rice, *sambar* and buttermilk were served. Though simple, it was verily a feast for the gods. The well-cooked aubergines simply melted in our mouths and the pleasure of the meal still lingers on my taste buds. Sri Niranjanananda Swami told me that a few weeks prior to my arrival, my father and mother had come to the ashram and had given a *bhiksha* to Sri Bhagavan and the ashramites. The devotion of my parents is for me a most highly cherished legacy, and my salvation as well!

In the middle of the year 1929 I had a tonsillectomy that eventually led to a severe attack of asthma. I was racked day and night with coughs. I was also spitting phlegm mixed with blood. I nevertheless carried on my professional duties without interruption. I went to Kattakal in Malabar during the Michaelmas vacation and undertook ayurvedic treatment, but the trouble only got worse. Allopathic treatment was also an utter failure. After that I got some medicine from a Madras Siddha[2] doctor that seemed to give some relief. I then went to Madras and took from the doctor medicines for a second course of treatment. On my way back from Madras to Madurai I broke

[1] There are four animal *samadhis*, including that of Lakshmi the cow, in a row near the dining room of Sri Ramanasramam. Bhagavan asked that all four be interred there. Though Bhagavan confirmed that Lakshmi the cow had realised the Self near the end of her life, he never publicly confirmed or denied that the other animals had realised the Self.

[2] Siddha is an indigenous South Indian system of medicine.

my journey at Tiruvannamalai and went to Sri Ramanasramam. After having the *darshan* of Bhagavan Maharshi, I was invited for lunch in the ashram.

This visit took place in December 1930. By that time two more buildings had come into existence. A spacious area surrounding the mother's *samadhi* contained a building covered by a thatched roof. Next to this building was a tiled hall with an elevated couch at one end and a large sitting space for about forty persons in front of the couch. This is now known as Bhagavan's old meditation hall. At present devotees meditate in this hall before a large portrait of the Maharshi that is placed on the couch.

I and my uncle Appachi Iyer, who had accompanied me, sat for lunch on the floor with leaf plates set before us. About twenty people, including Sri Bhagavan, were served a simple meal of vegetable curry, rice, *sambar* and buttermilk. Under the Siddha treatment I should have observed dietary restrictions. As I had been forbidden to take preparations containing chillies and tamarind, which were the primary ingredients of *sambar*, I decided to take only rice with buttermilk. I said something to that effect to Appachi Iyer who was sitting next to me. A heap of rice was served on my leaf plate. When the *sambar* arrived my uncle told the server that he should not serve me the *sambar* as I was under a strict medical diet that forbade it. The server turned a deaf ear and poured out two large ladlefuls of *sambar* over my rice. Appachi Iyer could not help raising a loud protest.

Sri Bhagavan must have been a close observer of all these happenings, for the instant he made the protest Sri Bhagavan said loudly, 'Having come here to be rid of all your ills, eat!'

The implication was that this was my medicine. I bent my head as I felt a little humiliated. However, at the same time I felt overjoyed by the promise of relief from my ills. I cleared the leaf of all its contents. I came to realise the full effect of that command-cum-benediction at the end of the year in Madurai.

Soon after lunch Chinnaswami presented me with a photo of Bhagavan, taken at the age of twenty-one, along with two small books. The first book was *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam*, five Tamil songs by Sri Ramana in praise of his father 'Arunachala Siva'. The second was *Ramana Stuti Panchakam*, five Tamil songs in praise of Sri Ramana by Satyamangalam Venkataramana Aiyer, about whom virtually nothing is known. Close devotees

of Bhagavan believe that Venkataramana Aiyer was none other than an apparition of Arunachala Siva himself, who manifested in order to sing the glory of his son Ramana.[3]

When I approached Sri Bhagavan with these gifts he graciously asked me what they were. I placed them in his hands and prostrated before him. With his fountain pen Sri Bhagavan corrected some printing errors in the two books, passed his right palm over the photo and presented them to me with his ever-blessed hands. That gift was benediction of life everlasting unto my poor self!

As Chinnaswami insisted on my having the evening meal in the ashram, I had no option but to accept. After the meal was over I followed Sri Bhagavan when he went out for a short stroll.

I prostrated before him and said, 'Bhagavan, I am doing Rama mantra *japa*. Is not Arunachala mantra *japa* superior to this?'

'No! No!' said Bhagavan vehemently. 'Both are identical. "Ra" means "that is" and "ma" means "thou". "A" in Arunachala means "that", "ru" means "thou", and "na" means "art".'

Then he added, 'Using your mind as your mouth, let the name Rama revolve continuously like Vishnu's *chakra* [discus-like weapon] within your mind. No others need know that you are doing *japa*.'

I interjected, 'If I spend all my time like that, what will happen to my teaching work? Will not my bread winning be in jeopardy?'

Sri Bhagavan replied, 'The one whose name you repeat will take full charge of all that. Don't be concerned about it.'

With devout prostrations before Bhagavan I took leave of him and returned to Madurai.

Before leaving the ashram Chinnaswami asked me to do an urgent job for the ashram in Madurai. At that time the Tamil biography *Sri Ramana Vijayam* by Kavi Yogi Shuddhananda Bharati was nearing completion. I was asked to take a photograph of Velli Ambala Nataraja, the majestic idol near the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Sundareswara Lingam in Sri

[3] Satyamangalam Venkataramana Aiyer visited Bhagavan while the latter was still living on the hill and sang these five songs, all original compositions and all praising Bhagavan. He only ever made this one brief visit to Bhagavan. When Narasimha Swami attempted to track him down while he was researching his biography of Bhagavan, he found that no one had ever heard of him in the small town in which he had said he lived.

Meenakshi Temple, before whom the boy Ramana stood for long spells of time, shedding copious tears of ecstasy. That was in the period just before he left Madurai for good. Secondly, I was asked to proceed with a good photographer to Tiruchuzhi, the birthplace of Sri Ramana, and get photographs of the temple tower, the temple tank, the inner corridor of the temple and the house where the Maharshi was born, which was near the Siva temple. I was told to send the negatives by registered post to the ashram without delay. I promised to do so and returned to Madurai.

Back again in Madurai I resumed my college duties and worked till the beginning of the Christmas vacation without taking leave for a single day, even though my illness was getting worse. I received two letters from the ashram during this period, asking for the photos. It seems they were required urgently as the book was being printed. It was the monsoon season, the skies were cloudy and the rain was incessant. I was then suffering from an inflammation of the intestines that had been caused by the Siddha medicines. To add to my troubles I had my usual asthma, piles and a severe attack of amoebic dysentery. Still, I thought, I must keep my promise to Chinnaswami. Along with a student of mine, P. R. S. Mani, who was an expert photographer, I rushed to Tiruchuzhi. P. R. S. Mani was not sure of getting any good shots as the sky was darkened by heavy clouds, but when we returned to Madurai and had the films washed and developed, they were not only clean, they were also perfect in every respect. Since the Meenakshi Temple authorities would not permit the taking of photos within the temple, a pen and ink drawing of the Nataraja idol by an expert artist was secured instead. I sent the photos and the picture by registered post to the ashram. In the covering letter, which was written in haste, I forgot to mention even a word about my illness. Soon afterwards, Chinnaswami sent me a copy of the printed book *Sri Ramana Vijayam* by registered post. This book has been up to this day my inspiration and scripture as well.

By the time the Christmas vacation commenced I was bed-ridden.[4] I was spitting phlegm mixed with blood, besides which

[4] When I spoke to Krishnamurti Aiyer in the early 1980s he told me an astonishing story that dates from this period:

'I had been sick for a long time. I was confined to bed and my pain and

I had racking intestinal pains with motions of mucus mixed with blood. My wife, who was looking after our four-year-old son and our six-month-old daughter, became worried and wired to her parents that my life was in danger. During the following day I told my wife that I felt that I might not live for more than a couple of days. Poor Subbhalakshmi was in tears. Scarcely had I spoken these words when a tall, lean figure approached and bent over me. It was Vilacheri Mani Aiyer, a boyhood friend of Sri Ramana. He had just returned from Tiruvannamalai where he had attended Sri Ramana's *jayanti* celebrations. Sizing up the situation, he immediately took out some of Bhagavan's *vibhuti* and *kumkum prasad*. With his own hands he placed a dot of *kumkum* on my forehead and rubbed the *vibhuti* on my brow. Immediately a thrill of joy shook my frame, infusing me with a feeling of vigorous health.

I sat up in my bed and told my wife, 'I am quite well, my dear. I will not die. Don't fear!'

Mani Swami then took leave of us.

That same night my wife's parents arrived with my cousin, Dr N. S. Rajagopal, who gave me an injection. I then had my first sound sleep after many months of sleeplessness. With further doses of medicine my intestinal pains and motions ceased, and in the course of two days my bowels became normal. Asthma

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suffering were so great, I was seriously contemplating suicide, simply because I couldn't stand the pain any more.

'One day I decided that I couldn't take any more pain. I went up to the roof of my house with the intention of throwing myself off the parapet wall. As I stood on the roof, summoning up the courage to execute the act, Arunachala Siva appeared before me, glowing resplendently.

'"What are you doing here?" he asked.

'I was ashamed to admit what I was doing, but I couldn't tell a lie.

'"I have been sick for a long time. The pain is excruciating. I can't take it any longer. I came up here to throw myself off the roof because living is too painful for me."

'Siva reprimanded me: "You think your problems are great, but are you the only one who experiences pain? In Tiruvannamalai people dig holes in me and light fires on me, but I don't react. I don't decide to commit suicide. I lie there unaffected by all these events. Now you go downstairs and behave the same way."

'Chastened by this reprimand, I went back to my bed and never contemplated suicide again.'

alone remained. I took a month's leave from college in continuation of the Christmas vacation. The doctor took my family and me to his home in Karur and treated me for the whole month, by which time I was fully restored to health and had no trace of asthma. Bhagavan Maharshi, Arunachala-Siva-Ramana, saved me from the jaws of death.

I then recollected the song I had heard being sung by Paramasivan Pillai in my fourth year at Trichy: '*Jai* [victory to] Sri Ramana! Victory unto my Lord Ramana-Siva!'

My soul sang the same song. I returned to Madurai with my family and resumed my duties at college a few days before the expiry of my sick leave.

From 1931 onwards I sought out Sri Ramana's boyhood friends in Madurai, and also other devotees who lived in the area. The devotees whom I met in Madurai formed quite a large group that was able to celebrate Sri Ramana's *jayanti* each year with great eclat. In that Ramana circle were Vilacheri Mani Swami and his brother Ranga Aiyer, who had also been at school with Bhagavan.[5] There were other Ramana associates such as Venkataramana Aiyer, Suppiah Thevar and Narayanaswami, along with the later devotees such as Viswanatha Swami, his brother Sundaresa Iyer and the young lawyer devotee S. R. Subramania Aiyer. Not a day passed without my meeting someone or other in this group. I used to roam about in their company every evening till a late hour in the night.

Narayanaswami, a member of this group, was a librarian in Madurai when I met him. He told me two remarkable incidents from Bhagavan's boyhood. The first concerns a rather violent game that Bhagavan and his friends used to indulge in. They would assemble in Bhagavan's house in the room where he eventually had his death experience. This room was selected because it was rarely used or visited by other members of the family. The young Ramana would roll himself up as tightly as he could and then encourage the others to pick him up and use him as a ball. He would be tossed from person to person and occasionally he would crash to the floor when a particular player failed to make a good catch. Astonishingly, despite many falls onto the hard floor, there was never any sign of a scratch or mark, let alone any muscular sprain or bone fracture.

[5] This is the same Rangan whose story appears in the first chapter.

The second story must have taken place in the interval between Bhagavan's Self-realisation and his departure for Arunachala six weeks later. Narayanaswami saw his friend sitting for long stretches of time in a small room on the first floor. Narayanaswami, thinking that it was some kind of meditation, asked Bhagavan if he could also learn how to sit like this. Bhagavan told him to sit cross-legged on the floor. As he was sitting there, Bhagavan pressed the point of a pencil midway between his eyebrows. Soon afterwards Narayanaswami lost all awareness of his body and the world and entered a trance that lasted for about half an hour. When he came back to his normal state the first thing he saw was Bhagavan's face wreathed with smiles. Narayanaswami tried several times to repeat this experience by himself, but he was never able to duplicate it.[6]

Narayanaswami accompanied Bhagavan's uncle when he went to Tiruvannamalai in the late 1890s in his family's first attempt to bring Sri Ramana back to Madurai. They found him in Venkatarama Naicker's mango grove. Narayanaswami was shocked to discover his jovial, ebullient school friend sitting immobile like a statue. On that occasion Bhagavan gave no sign whatsoever that he recognised his former friend, nor did he pay any attention to his plea that he should come back to Madurai and be looked after properly by his family. Narayanaswami told me that he realised that something irrevocable had happened to him, and that there could be no going back to his former life.

Ranga Aiyer, another member of our Madurai group, was a frequent visitor to Sri Ramanasramam. In one of our talks in Madurai he told me about a very remarkable incident that took place in the Mother's *samadhi* at the time when it was still a mud-walled building with a thatched roof. Sri Bhagavan had been sitting on a bench close to the wall. Ranga Aiyer, Ramaswami Pillai and a number of other *sadhus* were sitting on the floor in front of Sri Bhagavan. The group began to chant the Tamil verses in praise of Sri Bhagavan that are known as *Sri Ramana Stuti Panchakam*. As they began the chanting Sri Bhagavan was seated in the *sukhasana* [cross-legged] pose on the bench, while Ranga Aiyer was sitting on the floor just in

[6] This little-known incident appears to be the first time that Bhagavan used his power to bring about an experience in someone else. It is interesting to note that he intuitively knew how to do it.

front of him. Ranga Aiyer was sitting so near Bhagavan, his head was only a couple of inches away from the edge of the bench.

The fourth stanza in the third decad begins, 'Let me place your soft, holy feet on my head...'.

As this line was being chanted one of Sri Bhagavan's feet descended, came into contact with the top of Ranga Aiyer's head and stayed there for quite some time. The whole group, including Ranga Aiyer, was more or less hypnotised by this act and went on repeating the same stanza over and over again. It seems that they were quite incapable of proceeding any further. Only when Sri Bhagavan withdrew his foot and resumed his former *sukhasana* posture was the group able to continue and complete the chanting. The devotees all viewed this as a rare example of *pada diksha* [initiation by being touched by the Guru's foot]. I have spoken to Ramaswami Pillai about this incident, since he was present when it happened, and his own account agrees in every detail with Ranga Aiyer's.

One evening I went with Venkataramana Aiyer to the home of Suppiah Thevar. Both of them were boyhood associates of Bhagavan. Suppiah Thevar had his house in Pillaiyarpaliam, a village in the southern outskirts of Madurai. He was living there with his second wife, who was a Muslim. Thevar's residence was like an ashram. He had a meditation room in which his object of worship was a photo of Sri Ramana that was surrounded by dumb-bells and other implements used in the school of physical culture that he was then conducting.

That evening Thevar, Aiyer and myself assembled in that room for meditation. Aiyer started reading the eighteenth chapter of *Sri Ramana Gita,* a book of Sri Ramana's teachings by Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni. The chapter sings the glory of *siddha purushas* [perfected beings] of whom the Maharshi was the foremost, being Arunachala himself. As I listened with my eyes closed, a most amazing and unusual experience overtook me when the stanza beginning with the word *nilaravinda* [chapter thirteen, verse thirteen] was recited.

I suddenly experienced a coiled, luminous serpent moving upwards from the base of my spinal column. It flashed upwards to my cranium, spreading out as a canopy of lightning streaks that were gathered into a bright, roseate spot of light at the base of my nose, between the eyebrows. It returned immediately

as a luminous coil, winding a reverse cycle around the spinal column down to its starting point at the base of the vertebrae. The streaks were of different colours: one was roseate and the other was of a pale blue colour. At the same time the broad-based cone of Arunachala appeared over my head. From its peak an avalanche of nectar descended onto my head and drenched my whole body with an indescribable bliss. I lost consciousness of my body for a brief eternity, the luminosities alone remaining clear and bright. A little later, my body consciousness returned. All the luminosities disappeared except the one between the eyebrows, which continued to persist until I had had more experiences under the gaze of the Maharshi during the Sri Ramana *jayanti* of 1934-5 in Sri Ramanasramam.

I did not breathe a word about my experiences to my friends. During the experience they were aware that something unusual was happening to me, but they merely thought that I was in a trance. After we had finished meditating, the three of us wended our way to my house in Adimulam Pillai Agraharam. As we walked home I was barely conscious. Aiyer and Thevar had to support me by taking my arms on either side. Although I was semi-conscious, I distinctly recollect that the full moon was shining in all its glory. As we approached the place where the Sri Ramana Mandiram[7] now stands and faced the terrace of the Meenakshi Temple, I saw an astonishing sight: a queenly, beautiful young woman of about eighteen years, decked in a gold-spangled sari and glittering ornaments. She had rounded cheeks that glowed with the transparency of polished emeralds, and lustrous eyes that shed the cool radiance of the moon. It was Goddess Meenakshi [the deity of the Madurai Temple] herself in human form! I was overpowered by the vision, but my companions did not know what had happened to me. They literally carried me home and delivered me to my anxious wife at about 11 p.m. The next morning when I woke up, I was restored to my normal condition. I was able to carry on my duties at college without any difficulty.

Sometime in 1934, in the period prior to the commencement of my Christmas vacation, Venkataramana and myself arranged

[7] The house where Sri Ramana had the death experience that culminated in his enlightenment in 1896. The house was bought by Sri Ramanasramam and renamed Sri Ramana Mandiram (Sri Ramana Temple).

to spend a week, including *jayanti*, at Sri Ramanasramam with our families. The photographer P. R. S. Mani also decided to go with us.

On the *jayanti* day the celebrations started with *puja* at the shrine of the Mother's *samadhi*. Over a large open space in front of the *samadhi* temple a pandal had been erected to provide sitting accommodation for about 500 people. The flat, thatched roof of the pandal was decorated with sweet-smelling multi-coloured flowers that were strung into festoons, each about a metre long, that were tied to the roof of the pandal. As the sides of the pandal were open, the hill could be seen from inside it without any trees or buildings obstructing the view. Sri Bhagavan sat on a platform with his devotees all around him. I sat just a few feet away in front of him. Except for the *puja*, feebly heard from the temple, there was pin-drop silence dominated by the *maha mauna* [great silence] of Sri Bhagavan himself. Looking steadily at the figure of Bhagavan I mentally repeated *Aksharamanamalai*, the long devotional poem that Bhagavan composed in 1913. Its 108 verses all praise Arunachala, Bhagavan's *Sadguru*.

The last verse says, 'Adorn me, O Arunachala Ramana, with thy garland. May I in turn adorn thee with my garland.'

As I went on reciting the verses, the form of Bhagavan disappeared and in its place appeared the seated figure of the elephant-headed god, Ganapati. After a while this too disappeared. It was replaced by a lustrous, seated, human form that had the head of a boar. It was the Varaha avatar of Vishnu.[8] A few seconds later this too vanished. The form of the Maharshi was then seated before me as at the beginning. These visions fortified my conviction that these gods of the Hindu pantheon are as real as the form of the Maharshi himself, and that Bhagavan Maharshi is himself the incarnation of those gods.

When I came to the last verse of my recital, the temple bells sounded the close of the *puja* that would be completed with the *arati* [waving] of the camphor flame. At that moment the whole

[8] The first few avatars, or incarnations, of Vishnu were animals. The seventh and eighth were Rama and Krishna. The ninth in the traditional list is deemed to be foreign. Some people have claimed that either Christ or the Buddha was this avatar. The tenth and final avatar, who will incarnate at some indeterminate future date, will be Kalki.

assembly rose as one man to witness the *arati*. In a trice the crowd pulled off all the strings of flowers from the roof of the pandal. Every person there, including the Maharshi and myself, suddenly found a garland around his neck. Chancing to look at the Arunachala hill, I found that it resembled a transparency with only its outline visible. Inside the hill, reaching up to its summit, was a Siva *lingam* with a large multi-coloured garland of flowers around its form. Arunachala Ramana had accepted my song garland, *Aksharamanamalai*, and had garlanded me in return! The prayer in the last verse of the song was thus perfectly fulfilled.

On the evening of the day after *jayanti* Sri Bhagavan was seated on the couch in the meditation hall. S. Narayana Aiyer, professor of mathematics in the Madurai College, told a few stories about the time when he was at school with Bhagavan in Dindigul.

At one point he said, 'When we played team games, we would divide into two groups that were invariably headed by Ramana and me. The group led by Ramana would always win. So, the two groups would vie with each other to get *Tanga-kai*[9] as their leader.'

When Aiyer related this, Sri Bhagavan laughed and said, 'You see Narayana, I now have no body. I lost it long ago when I came here. Since I am bodiless, where is the hand that holds the title *Tanga-kai*? Of the two of us leaders, one of us has disappeared through the loss of his body. You, the survivor, must succeed to the title. You are now '*Tanga-kai*' Narayana. To commemorate your accession to this title you can have my old walking stick.'

It was made of sandalwood and it had been presented to him by a rich devotee. Bhagavan did not like new or expensive products. If devotees gave them, Bhagavan might use them once to make the donor happy. Afterwards they would be put in an ashram storeroom.

While presenting the stick, Bhagavan continued, 'Do they not usually give a medal along with a title? Where am I to go for a

[9] *Tanga-kai*, meaning 'golden-hand', was Bhagavan's boyhood nickname. He was given it because whichever team he played for always won. In Tamil Nadu this name is often given to people who have demonstrated that they have a lot more luck than is statistically probable.

gold medal? In the place of a medal you shall have this walking stick!'

At the conclusion of his speech, Bhagavan presented Professor Narayana with the symbol of his new title.

Then the talk moved on to recollections of how Sri Ramana and his friends would climb the high, solid mountain of granite, the hill in Dindigul. Narayana Aiyer said that the Arunachala hill, heavily overlaid with earth, could easily be climbed and that it could not be compared to the Dindigul hill that was a slippery rock of granite.

Sri Ramana laughed and said, 'Oh! Is that so? Venkataramana, please take Narayana to the top of Arunachala early tomorrow morning. Let him see how easy it is to climb up this hill.'

Early next morning at 3 a.m. Sri Bhagavan took us to the kitchen where he himself prepared a vessel full of *uppuma* for our lunch on the hill. Venkataramana Aiyer took charge of it. After some refreshment, a party of five consisting of Venkataramana Aiyer, Professor Narayana Aiyer, photographer P. R. S. Mani and myself, all under the leadership of Arunachala Shastri, who knew the path up to the top of the hill, started to climb at about 4.30 a.m. Just then my boy Setu Ram and my daughter Muthu Meenakshi, who had been sleeping with me in Bhagavan's meditation hall, woke up with uproarious cries and would not let me go. Sri Bhagavan pacified them.

Holding each child by the hand, he said to me, 'Krishnamurti! You attend to your business and go. I shall take care of the children.'

'Here is my Bhagavan to take care of me and my family. He has packed me off to my salvation on the top of Arunachala!' So sang my soul as I hurried to join the party that had already gone some distance up the hill.

On my return from the excursion my wife told me how the children, during my absence, were taken to the kitchen where they were engaged in peeling some beans with Bhagavan until she came in the morning and took charge of them. As ladies were not allowed to stay in the ashram at night, my wife spent each night, along with the child Ramanan, in the house of Mudaliar Patti in town. She would return to the ashram early in the morning.

We reached the top of the hill with some difficulty after taking our lunch at Seven Springs where we had a plentiful supply of

sweet and cool drinking water. By the time we reached the top of the hill *Tanga-kai* Narayana Aiyer was completely exhausted.

He stretched himself flat on the ground and moaned, 'What a fool I was to compare Arunachala to Dindigul hill! I cannot move. I shall die here!'

We gave him plenty of time to rest and then helped him by turns all the way down the hill. We reached the ashram at about 5 p.m.

When we prostrated before Bhagavan, Bhagavan congratulated his old friend by saying, 'Narayana, are you not fifty-four? At this age you have really performed a feat!'

Narayana Aiyer laughed and forgot all his pains.

During this visit my son had an interesting encounter with Bhagavan.

He went up to Bhagavan, who was just starting out on his morning walk, and called after him, '*Tata, tata* [grandfather, grandfather], Bhagavan *tata*!'[10]

The following conversation then took place:

Maharshi: Who are you?

Boy: I am Setu Ram Das.

Maharshi: Who is your father?

Boy: N. R. Krishnamurti Aiyer.

M: How is it? Your dad is called Aiyer. How can you be called Das?

Boy: I am Setu Ram only. Is that all right *tata*?

M: Quite all right. Now, what do you want?

Boy: Please give me a walking stick.

M: Why? What for?

Boy: The other day you gave one to that *tata*. Please also give me a stick.

M: What? Are you an old man? How old are you?

Boy: No, I am only a small boy. I am aged seven. Please give me one. A small stick will do.

[10] To call someone '*Tata*' does not necessarily imply a family relationship. It is simply a customary and respectful way for young people to address men who are past middle age.

M: What for?

Boy: I will always keep it with me. That way I will always remember my Bhagavan *tata*.

M: All right! Go and wait in the hall. You shall have your stick. (Bhagavan then whispered something to his attendant, Sadhu Rangaswami.)

Sri Bhagavan returned to the hall, wiped his feet with his towel and took his seat on the couch. Sadhu Rangaswami came in and placed a stick before him. It was an old, broken, walking stick, once used by Bhagavan. It had been polished and cut to a size to suit a little boy.

Then Sri Bhagavan narrated the incident, enacting the two characters in his own inimitable way to the amused audience before him. Soon afterwards the little boy in high glee stepped forward and received his prize from Bhagavan's own blessed hands. He is now a chemical engineer and a member of a panel of experts that advises the Central Government in New Delhi.

On an afternoon following the *jayanti*, Sri Bhagavan was in the meditation hall. He was sitting on his couch like a statue, facing towards the west end of the hall. I sat right in front of him trying to repeat mentally *Aksharamanamalai*, but I was at first distracted by the melodious music of Alamelu Ammal of Madurai. She was singing songs from the *Tiruppugazh*, a series of poems on Lord Subramaniam that were written by the celebrated Tiruvannamalai saint Arunagirinathar many centuries ago. The bright dot of light on my brow, a residue of my experience in Madurai, was still glowing. I resisted the attraction of the music and carried on my mental recitation of *Aksharamanamalai*. As I went through the verses I held my breath and fixed my unwinking eyes on the form of the Maharshi. Suddenly the left half of Bhagavan's form became the left half of a female with a fulsome breast. I began to see in Bhagavan the form of Uma-Maheswara, the right half being the half of the male Siva and the left half that of the Goddess Parvati. This unique form of man-cum-woman is known in Hindu mythology by the names Ardhanariswara and Uma-Maheswara. The scripture giving the story of the manifestation of the mountain Arunachala narrates how, when Lord Siva's consort Parvati was performing *pradakshina* around the hill, which is the God Siva, she merged as the left half of the hill, while the right side of the

hill remained just as it was before. This reformed hill of the male-female combination as it exists at present is also known as Umayaval-Bhagan, meaning Siva whose one half is Uma. This Uma-Maheswara was now before me in the living form of the Maharshi, its eyes riveted to mine, holding them in a tight embrace. Suddenly I felt my skull split along the top of the crown, and a gush of bright red light shot upwards from the opening. Simultaneously, a jet of nectar burst forth from the breast of the form before me, and a similar jet erupted from a part of Arunachala that I had come to regard as Uma. As the two jets joined and landed on my crown the crack in the skull closed and sealed without leaving a trace. The outflow of fire quickly stopped, but I still felt it within me. Imprisoned there, it made the lower concave surface of the skull glow with a white brilliance similar to that of a big carbo-electric arc. Surprisingly, the terrible heat of the arc was not there. The head as well as the body felt refreshingly cooled in spite of the incandescent white glow.

As I regained my normal world-consciousness, I discovered that it was evening. After some time all the people in the meditation hall, along with Bhagavan, who had now resumed his original form, adjourned for dinner. I did not leave the hall but lay myself down on the rug spread over the floor, where one or two devotees, including Bhagavan's attendant, slept during the night with Bhagavan himself.

After dinner everybody in the hall retired for the night. At dawn the lights were lit and a devotee, Ramachandra Rao of Bangalore, sat before Bhagavan and recited verses from *The Ribhu Gita*. The phrase '*Aham Brahman, aham Brahman*' [I am *Brahman*], repeated in nearly every verse, indicates the import of the work. As I listened to the chanting, at a point within the right side of my chest there was an echoing reverberation of '*Aham Brahman, aham Brahman*'. All the light that was on the crown of my head and my brow was drained off into that point, and a jet of blissful, ethereal nectar gushed forth from that centre in the chest and filled my whole body, causing it to tingle with intense bliss.[11] With this ethereal nectar gushing out of every

[11] Krishnamurti Aiyer's experiences are classic descriptions of what can happen when the *kundalini* is suddenly activated. He was fortunate to have them in the presence of a great Master such as Bhagavan since there

pore of my skin, I rushed out of the hall into the open space. The inundation I was experiencing was gushing forth, extending up to the infinities of space, drenching all the objects on the way. It was vibrant with a feeling of Consciousness-Being in which my body and all other bodies were like shadowy flakes of snow in an ocean of limpid, cool and sweet water. I closed my eyes and felt myself to be the clear sky of Consciousness-Being. Then I opened my eyes and discovered myself to be an ocean of the ethereal all-pervasive fluid. I was aware of myself as Consciousness-Being with the shadow forms of objects afloat in this ethereal fluid. Like a phantom I moved back into the hall and resumed my seat.

As I sat down a thought flashed within me: 'I must now disappear forever into the forests of the Arunachala hill.'

An instant later I saw my wife in tears. My baby Ramanan was in her arms, and she was accompanied by my little boy

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are many recorded instances of people who, unsupervised, find that these initially blissful episodes turn into excruciating painful experiences.

Kundalini yogis work at making the *kundalini* rise from the base of the spine through a channel called the *sushumna* to the top of the head. When the energy reaches the *sahasrara*, a centre in the subtle body that is actually located slightly above the top of the skull, *nirvikalpa samadhi* is supposed to result. Bhagavan did not contest that this was possible, but he did say that Self-realisation would not result merely because the *kundalini* had reached the *sahasrara*. Uniquely among Masters, he said that there was a channel that went from the *sahasrara* to the heart-centre, which he said was located in the right side of the chest. This is not one of the *chakras* or centres of classical yoga. It is, according to Bhagavan, the place in the body where the 'I'-thought rises and subsides. Krishnamurti Aiyer seems to have had an experience of this channel since his *sahasrara* experience evolved into one whose locus was clearly the right-side heart centre that Bhagavan frequently spoke of.

'... a *paranadi* [supreme channel] is said to rise up from the coccyx through the *sushumna* to the brain and descends to the heart....the yogi is engaged in cleaning the *nadis* [the psychic channels through which the *kundalini* is said to flow]; then *kundalini* is awakened which is said to rise up from the coccyx to the head. The yogi is later advised to come down to the Heart as the final step.' *(Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 474.)

Bhagavan did not encourage any practice that was likely to lead to an activation of the *kundalini* energy. He taught instead that self-enquiry, by itself, was sufficient to make the *kundalini* go to the right-side heart-centre.

Setu Ram and my daughter Muthu Meenakshi.

Sri Bhagavan looked at me and said, strongly and forcefully, 'Krishnamurti! Go back home to Madurai with your family. That salvation you want to gain as a *sannyasin* in the forest you will have even as a householder in your profession! I say, "Return home!"'

Was that also a vision? I am unable to say what it was.

My friend Venkataramana Aiyer, who seems to have had similar experiences a long time ago, consoled my wife by saying that I was only in a sort of trance that would soon pass off. Soon afterwards he took the whole party, including myself in a somewhat dazed condition, back to my home in Madurai.

After I returned to Madurai I slowly recovered my mundane condition. However, my wife, after becoming aware of all the experiences I had had, expressed a fear that I might run away from the family and become a *sadhu*. As I could not guarantee my subsequent behaviour, I consoled her by giving her a copy of *Tiruvembavai*, a mystical poem that was composed at Arunachala more than a thousand years ago by the great Saivite saint Manikkavachagar.

Some time later, when my wife was reading this booklet in the presence of Bhagavan, he asked her what she was reading. She walked up to him and put the book in his hands.

Bhagavan looked at it and returned it saying, 'All right, all right. Go on reading this book. Don't fear.'

Since Bhagavan seemed to know the context in which this book had been given, this assurance convinced my wife that I would not run away.

After this eventful trip to the ashram at the end of 1934, it took me some time to recover my normal state. With only four days before me until the reopening of the college, I found my thinking capacity paralysed. How then could I lecture in the classroom? I began to panic and felt that only Bhagavan could help me.

I took a train and rushed back to Tiruvannamalai, reaching the ashram early the next morning. I was afraid to speak to Sri Bhagavan. So I just sat before him. He seemed totally indifferent to my plight and did not even look in my direction. At breakfast time I followed the people to the dining hall for morning coffee and bolted down the refreshment. After breakfast I selected the book *Jnana Vasishta* from Bhagavan's bookshelf in the

meditation hall and took it to the Mother's *samadhi*.

I prostrated before the Siva *lingam* and murmured, 'O Mother! Your son does not care even to look at me. I am distraught on account of innumerable difficulties. By your grace I must get a definite answer from this book that will clear all my difficulties.'

I sat near a window in a corner and started reading the verses with great earnestness. Time was forgotten. By about 6 p.m. I finished the reading, having been struck by the significance of one of the verses: 'In the interval between two successive flights of thought there is a silence in which shines the pure consciousness of the Self.'

I said to myself, 'Well, I am repeating "Rama, Rama". Each sound of Rama is a thought, so there must be a silence of pure consciousness in between the two utterances of Rama. That Consciousness-Being is the Self.'

Feeling overjoyed by my experience in Mother's *samadhi*, I went to the dining room and quickly ate my night meal. I prostrated before Bhagavan and took leave of him. The Maharshi merely nodded his head with a knowing, benevolent smile. By the next morning I was back in Madurai in a fit condition to resume my teaching work.

Shortly before these events took place I had received from my paternal grandmother, a woman who lived in Tiruvannamalai, a string of beads that had been used by her for counting Rama *japa* mantras. I started to use this rosary to count my own Rama *japa*. I pursued this *sadhana* so earnestly, it occupied all the time that was not taken up by work or sleep. My *japa* was no hindrance to my teaching work, which was as efficient as ever. In due course I discovered a relationship. The more active work one gives to the body, the more food one needs; and the more one eats the more one needs to sleep. Unnecessary activity not only wastes time, it results in a larger intake of food that in itself results in a further waste of time because the extra food intake needs extra sleep to process it. As time lost in sleep and unwanted activities reduced the amount of time available for *japa*, I curtailed my activities, limiting myself to my professional work and walks of about a couple of miles to and from my college. There was double benefit from the time cut from unwanted work and unwanted sleep. In the course of about five years I finished about eighty million repetitions of the Rama mantra.

I used to turn up at Ramanasramam once or twice a month during my weekend breaks. I noted that as soon as I entered the ashram the *japa* came to a complete stop, and that it started again the moment I stepped out of the ashram. It was the effect of the grand silence of the Maharshi. During the period of my stay in the ashram I was afraid of going anywhere near the Maharshi. Instead, I would spend my time in the work of the kitchen. My hands would be busy while inwardly I was pure, still, Consciousness-Being.

At the end of the year 1940 I found it very difficult to continue the mantra repetition. When Shantammal, one of the lady devotees who worked in the ashram kitchen, visited me in Madurai, I mentioned my difficulty.

She said, 'You should be happy indeed about this! The name Rama is *saguna Brahman*. [*Brahman* with manifest attributes]. It has resolved itself into the silent *nirguna Brahman* [unmanifest, attributeless *Brahman*] of the Self, the motionless Being-Consciousness. The goal of the *japa sadhana* has been attained. That is why there is no more *japa*.'

When she went to Sri Ramanasramam she took with her my copy of *The Ribhu Gita*. It was returned to me in special circumstances when I went to the ashram to attend the Navaratri celebrations in October 1941.

In 1934 my father was living at Tiruchirappalli along with my brother Narayanaswami and his wife Thayammal. While he was there my father was afflicted by a strangulated hernia, a complaint that generally requires an immediate operation. My brother wired this news to me at Madurai, and he also informed my sister Alamelu Ammal, who lived in Tiruvannamalai, about the crisis. On receipt of the telegram my sister went to Sri Ramanasramam. Placing the telegram in Sri Bhagavan's hands, with tears in her eyes, she implored Bhagavan to save my father's life.

With a most tender look Bhagavan said, 'Don't be afraid! Your father is all right!'

When my sister and I arrived at Tiruchirappalli the next morning, we found our father safe and sound. My friend Dr K. R. N. Chari, who came to our house to take my father to his hospital for the operation, was able to release the strangulation by gently manipulating it. Later it turned out that Dr Chari's manipulations had produced the unexpected result just at the

time Sri Bhagavan spoke his words of consolation to my sister. We wondered at the potency of Sri Bhagavan's words and rendered profuse thanks before Bhagavan's picture in our *puja* room.

During May 1936, during my summer vacation, I did some research work in sound at Tata's Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore. I was studying under Professor C. V. Raman, a Nobel Laureate in physics, who was then the director of the institute. One night while I was there I woke up from a terrible dream in which I saw my father lying lifeless on the floor. He had been felled by a heavy stone that had struck his head. I woke up with a great feeling of terror and sat up in bed. With tears in my eyes I prayed to Bhagavan to save my father's life. Afterwards, I spent the rest of the night repeating *Ramana Stuti Panchakam*.

The next morning I got a telegram from my brother Natarajan, who was in my village, Nangavaram. It stated that my father had had a strangulation of the intestines due to a hernia. I took immediate leave from Professor Raman and arrived at my village the next morning.

On reaching Nangavaram I was pleasantly surprised to find that my father was perfectly well. My brother Natarajan gave me an interesting account of what had happened.

'After sending the telegram to you, I immediately sent a messenger to Seenu Anna (my brother, Dr N. R. Srinivasan) at Trichy. On hearing the news Seenu Anna brought the expert surgeon Dr T. S. S. Rajan who promptly arrived here with the necessary outfit for an emergency operation in the village itself. Both doctors arrived here in Dr Rajan's car. When the doctors arrived they saw the would-be patient digging in the backyard garden of the house with a spade. They then, quite justifiably, berated me for playing such a costly hoax. By way of apology I told them that father had been groaning with pain for over two hours, and that for some time after he stopped his groaning, he closed his eyes and remained still. At that time I was afraid that he might be dead. However, an hour later he said that he was perfectly all right, and straight away he went to the backyard with a spade and completed the digging of a pit he had almost finished digging the previous day. When I told this story to the doctors they became convinced that I had not played a joke on them. They told me that it was fortunate for the patient that

they had come there that day itself because, they informed me, another strangulation might occur any day and that without medical help death might result.

'They decided to go ahead with the operation and began to set up their equipment.

'Immediately father began to shout at the doctors, saying, "Hey Seenu! I want none of this nonsense! I don't want to die at the hands of this Dr Rajan. Be off with you Dr Rajan! Go and mind your business and leave me alone!"

'Dr Rajan had the magnanimity to ignore this rude behaviour as he felt that it was emanating from a sick old man who could not be held responsible for his ravings. The doctors departed, since they could not operate on an unwilling patient. Dr Rajan declined to accept his fee since Seenu Anna was also a member of the medical profession.'

Though my father had not given any sensible explanation to the departing doctors, he was happy to tell me what had really happened.

'You see, Krishnamurti,' he said, 'it was Ramana Bhagavan's grace that saved me from the hands of that Dr Rajan, whose operation killed your mother twelve years ago. As soon as I got the trouble I prostrated before Bhagavan's picture and laid myself on my bed. I went on repeating *Aksharamanamalai* and by Bhagavan's grace I recovered. These doctors wanted to frighten me by saying that I would certainly die in this village for want of medical attention the next time this trouble recurred. I told them to mind their business and go. That same Bhagavan who saved me today will also save me in future. I am now perfectly well, no thanks to these doctors!'

Since my father had obviously recovered, I felt there was no need to wire my sister in Tiruvannamalai. All these events had happened without any hint of the crisis ever reaching the ashram. The combined prayers of father and son had obtained a quick response and relief from Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. He is omnipresent and omnipotent, besides being a most merciful ocean of grace!

A few days later I took my father to Madurai and consulted a specialist in these matters called Dr Ambat Narayana Menon. My father was then fifty-seven years old. I wanted to know whether or not it was advisable for my father, who also suffered from asthma, to have the operation that the other doctors had

recommended. The doctor examined the chest, the heart, the blood and the urine and gave his considered opinion that the operation would be fatal and should not be performed. My father's intuition, resulting in his refusal to be operated on that day in Nangavaram, proved to be perfectly right and correct. The doctor prescribed a course of medicines and an elastic belt to control the hernia. Duly equipped with these medicines and the belt my father returned to Nangavaram. However, I was told that the hernia operation could not be postponed indefinitely. It did take place in Tiruvannamalai quite successfully seven years later in 1943, and my father lived on until 1960.

Sometime in 1935, when I was in Sri Ramanasramam, I started reading *Sri Ramana Gita*, a book written by Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni. The second verse of chapter two, written by Bhagavan himself, reads:

> In the interior of the heart, *Brahman* alone shines in the form of the *Atman* with direct immediacy as 'I', 'I'. Enter into the heart either by a questing mind, or by diving deep within, or through control of breath, and remain established in the *Atman*.

After reading this verse I felt an urge to verify its truth by having a direct experience of the Heart. I had already read about the spiritual heart-centre in verses eighteen and nineteen of *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*. There this heart-centre is described in the following terms:

> 18 Between the two breasts, below the chest and above the abdomen, there are six centres of different colours. One of these resembles the bud of a water lily inside and is situated two digits to the right [of the centre]. This is the heart.
>
> 19 It is inverted and within it is a tiny orifice in which dwells dense darkness [ignorance] along with desires, etc. All the great psychic nerves [*nadis*] depend on it. It is the abode of the *pranas*, the mind and the light [of consciousness].

As I read the verse in *Sri Ramana Gita* and recollected the verses in *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*, I felt a great desire arise

within me: I wanted Sri Bhagavan to touch me and give me a direct experience of this heart-lotus.

Quite absorbed in the reading of the *Gita*, I forgot to proceed to the dining hall for my morning refreshment. I later learned that my absence there had been noticed by Sri Bhagavan. When Sri Bhagavan went out for his morning stroll after coffee, I followed him.

I said, 'Bhagavan, Bhagavan, please, touch me with your own blessed finger at the right spot in my chest so that I can have a direct vision of the heart-lotus.'

Sri Bhagavan smiled and said, 'Don't bother about that. It is only a mental concept.'

I was disappointed to get that answer.

I thought, 'If it were merely a concept, why should there be so much elaboration upon it in the two books?'

I continued to follow Bhagavan. He turned round and asked me what else I wanted.

'Bhagavan,' I said, 'I want you to clear some of my doubts.'

'Very well,' he replied, 'go back to the dining room and take your coffee. After that you can await my arrival in the meditation hall. There you can ask me about anything you want.'

Heedless of the advice, I continued to follow him.

Sri Bhagavan turned round again and said, 'Why are you still coming after me?'

I continued to follow him, saying, 'There is neither a "comer" nor a "goer" here.'

'Why can't you ask all these questions in the hall after my return?' asked Sri Bhagavan.

'I am too shy to put those questions with so many people around me.'

Sri Bhagavan put the tip of his right forefinger on the tip of his nose.

'Oho! There is no comer "I", no goer "I". From where did this new shy person "I" sprout?'

Having been defeated in the argument, I blurted out, 'Who will dare to bandy words with you? One should instead keep quiet and lay prone and motionless at your feet with both breath and speech controlled!'

With his face glowing with a benevolent smile, and with his right hand raised in *chinmudra* [a traditional gesture of benediction], Sri Bhagavan said, 'That is all! That alone is!'

I went back to the dining hall and never again raised that question about the heart-lotus. However, I did have a vision of this heart-lotus soon after my return to Madurai.

From the beginning of 1935, soon after those memorable experiences during the *jayanti* of 1934, I was mentally repeating the Rama mantra continuously except at the times taken up by work or sleep. During those periods I was aware of the vibrations of the mantra but I was not initially aware of the place in the body where they came from. Every night I used to watch the brief interval that stood between the last moment of waking consciousness and the first moment of nescient sleep. I also did this for the other interval when sleep changed over to waking.

As the practice developed, a regular sequence of events began to manifest. Soon after going to bed, after closing my eyes and repeating mentally the Rama mantra, the world around me would disappear and merge into my body. The body in turn would then merge into the heart-centre and the mantra vibration would be the sole experience until it finally merged into the nescience of sleep. In the morning, as sleep ended, the first wakeful experience of the mantra vibration would emerge at the point of the heart-centre, followed by the emergence of the body and the world in quick succession.[12]

One night, after a hard day's work, I went to bed at 9 p.m. and closed my eyes, repeating the Rama mantra as usual. Instead of the dark nescience that usually followed the merging of the

[12] Bhagavan taught that consciousness of the body and the world first rises in this right-hand heart centre and from there spreads out to the rest of the body. By focusing on the mantra and finding out where its sound ultimately arose, Krishnamurti Aiyer was attempting to follow the famous advice that Bhagavan gave to Ganapati Muni in their first meeting in 1908:

[Bhagavan to Ganapati Muni] 'If one observes that from which the "I-I" rises, the mind will subside there. That is *tapas*.'

Ganapati Muni immediately replied, 'Cannot the same result be obtained through mantra *japa* as well?'

Bhagavan answered, 'If, while one is doing *japa* of a mantra, one observes where the sound of that mantra rises from, the mind will subside there. That is *tapas*.'

A fuller account of this exchange can be found on page 111. At this stage of his *sadhana* Krishnamaurti's efforts were culminating in sleep. For this approach to be totally successful, the sound would have to resolve itself into sleep-free consciousness.

mantra vibration, I had a quite different experience. The mantra vibration merged into a limitless, uniform space of roseate light, at every point alert with a feeling of Consciousness-Being, and nothing else. It came as a flash and seemed to quickly disappear, but when I woke up thinking, 'What a strange dream!' I chanced to look at my watch and found that it was past midnight! Three hours of waking time had been lost within the brief duration of that luminous experience.

Some time later I met Sadhu Arunachala (Major Chadwick) in the ashram and told him about this experience. Sadhu Arunachala responded by saying that he too had had a similar experience that he subsequently reported to Bhagavan. Bhagavan had informed him that it was only a vision, and that it should not be confused with an experience of the Self. Bhagavan added that the luminous entity was nothing but an amalgam, so to say, of the nescience of sleep with the pure light of the consciousness of the Self.

On subsequent nights, after closing my eyes for sleep, I continued to concentrate on the point from where the mantra *japa* proceeded, but the experience did not recur. On one such night I had the vision of a lily in full bloom (the Heart-Lotus) at the heart-centre. It radiated a golden light that filled my chest. It was only a vision that appeared, stayed for some time and then disappeared, but it was a most vivid experience. I knew that it was only a conceptual entity, but even so my heart rejoiced that at long last Bhagavan had acceded to my request and shown me that Heart-Lotus of the scriptures. Of course, I had not reached the goal of my *sadhana*. I still had to work hard with Bhagavan's guidance until I arrived at the goal of victory; that is, abidance in the being-awareness of the pure, still Self.

I continued my Rama *japa* with renewed vigour till 1941. In October of that year I received an invitation to attend the Navaratri celebrations at the Mother's Temple in Sri Ramanasramam. In that invitation letter Chinnaswami had added the note that his grandson V. Ganesan, at present the managing editor of *The Mountain Path,* then aged five years, was to have his *Akshara-Abhyasam* during the festival. On this occasion a boy's education is started with the ceremonial teaching of the Tamil alphabet (*akshara*). The word *akshara*

also has an esoteric meaning, namely the 'word' of the silent teaching of the Self.

I told myself, 'Am I not also a child of the ashram like Ganesan? I too shall get my *Akshara-Abhyasam* from my *Sadguru* Bhagavan Maharshi.'

When I arrived at the ashram Shantammal returned my copy of *The Ribhu Gita*. She told me that Sri Bhagavan had taken that copy from her one day and with his own blessed hands had corrected about a hundred printing mistakes in the book. What a rare piece of luck it was for me!

On the auspicious day of Vijayadasami [the final day of the Navaratri festival] I stood before Bhagavan with this book in my hand. When he asked me what I was holding, I placed the book in his hands.

I said, 'Bhagavan, please select for me the most important portion of the book for my daily recital'.

Sri Bhagavan opened the book and showed me the twenty-sixth chapter, saying, 'The recital of this chapter is itself *samadhi*'.

I prostrated and received the book, this precious gift, from the blessed hands of Sri Bhagavan himself. This book was a valuable addition to the two previous gifts in 1930 of the books *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam* and *Sri Ramana Stuti Panchakam*.

I read *The Ribhu Gita* daily until I had learned by heart all the forty-five verses in the twenty-sixth chapter. Later on, the continuous repetition of the verses became natural to me. I continued this *sadhana* until one of my later visits to Sri Ramanasramam.

In August 1946, on one of my visits, I prostrated to Bhagavan just as he was returning to the ashram after his morning stroll. Sri Bhagavan, who was weak in his knees due to rheumatism, staggered slightly because he was not expecting my interception.

He steadied himself with some effort, halted and then with an annoyed expression told me, 'What a nuisance! People will not give up their genuflections before me at all odd times and places!'

I felt very sorry and promptly begged his forgiveness.

Immediately he cooled down and with the glow of a benevolent smile adorning his face, he asked, 'What do you want?'

I picked up courage and replied, 'By your grace, Bhagavan, I

have the experience of the Self. Please let me know how all my sleeping time could be a continuous *kevala nirvikalpa samadhi*, and how at other times I could be in *sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi*.'

Sri Bhagavan replied, 'You cannot do anything while you are asleep. At all other times you must assiduously practise the enquiry "Who am I?" The ripe fruit you want will reach your hands of its own accord.'

With this benediction I got my final *upadesa* from the blessed lips of my beloved Lord and Master, *Sadguru* Ramana. I had nothing more to ask from him. I knew that I had to work hard to achieve my objective, and that nothing else remained for me.

Ramana Maharshi's sixtieth birthday was celebrated on a large scale during the *jayanti* of 1939. The ashram fed many poor people for three successive days, including the *jayanti* day itself. Devotees from all parts of India and the world gathered in the ashram for the celebration. At that time the question of building a large, traditional, granite temple over the *samadhi* of the Mother was being hotly debated. There were two sharply opposed views on the subject, but Bhagavan himself was, as usual, silent on the matter and was quite uncommitted to either of the two parties. Chinnaswami, the ashram manager, was intent on building the temple. He was strongly supported by the old disciples of Ganapati Muni such as G. Sambasiva Rao, Voruganti Venkatakrishnayya, who was the author of a Telugu biography of Bhagavan, Professor Subbaramaiya and several others. But there was strong opposition from a sizeable group of Sri Bhagavan's other devotees. This group held that the primary object of the ashram management should be to provide food and accommodation for visiting and resident devotees. They also thought that the ashram should undertake to feed large numbers of the local poor people on a regular basis. The anti-temple group felt that money should not be wasted on the purchase of unnecessary stones, bricks and mortar.

Such devotees used to say, 'Are there not enough temples in Tiruvannamalai? Why add one more to them? We should purchase some fertile lands with the funds we collect. If we own our own fields, we can always be assured of a plentiful supply of food.'

This strong opposition almost reduced Chinnaswami to tears of despair.

During my stay in the ashram I had occasion to pay my respects to Sri Rama Yogi, who was an adept in the *japa* of Rama *shadakshari*, a Rama mantra of six syllables. He was held in high esteem for his yogic attainments. Soon after my return to Madurai, Sri Rama Yogi, his attendant Venkatasubba Reddy, and Voruganti Venkatakrishnayya, arrived at my home in Madurai. They were going on a pilgrimage to several sacred shrines in South India, so I joined them and accompanied them for about a month. The pilgrimage was not a very peaceful one because we had a lot of arguments, mostly about the merits of the proposed temple over the Mother's *samadhi*. Sri Rama Yogi repeatedly voiced his opposition to the project by saying that the whole scheme was a waste of money.

'Why should there be a temple for the Maharshi's mother,' he demanded to know, 'when there is no temple for Kausalya, the mother of Rama, who was an avatar of Vishnu himself?'

I did not agree with such sentiments. So, when a letter arrived from Madurai, saying that my daughter had chicken pox, I used it as an excuse to return home.

I took leave of the pilgrims and went back to Madurai. On the night after my arrival I had a dream. I was in a clearing in a forest on the Arunachala hill. The whole of the open space was bathed in the light of the full moon. I saw Sri Bhagavan in the clearing with a tall, majestic attendant whose body shone like burnished gold. I approached Bhagavan and prostrated before him.

As soon as I got up Sri Bhagavan questioned me: 'Krishnamurti, do you know who the Mother is?'

I promptly answered, 'Mother is Bhagavan and Bhagavan is the Mother'.

Bhagavan smiled and said, 'That is correct!'

I turned to one side to look at the lustrous attendant and found him to be none other than Bhagavan's brother, Niranjanananda Swami. As soon as I got up the next morning I sent Rs 100 to Chinnaswami along with a covering letter requesting him to accept the offering and use it for the construction of the Mother's Temple. Some nine years later I had the joy and satisfaction of witnessing the consecration of a temple over the Mother's *samadhi* that contained, in the *sanctum*

sanctorum, a Meru Chakra that had been blessed by Bhagavan's own hands.

During the *jayanti* celebrations of 1939 the question of acquiring the house in Tiruchuzhi where Bhagavan was born was also considered. When my father, called affectionately 'Vakil Tata' [literally 'Lawyer Grandfather'] by Niranjanananda Swami, was consulted, he promised his wholesale support to gain that objective. Soon afterwards, Sri Bhagavan's close devotee and personal attendant, the Madras lawyer T. P. Ramachandra Aiyer, came to our house in Madurai on a mission to gather all the necessary information about the ownership of Bhagavan's birth place. Shortly before he left the ashram Bhagavan had advised Aiyer to take me along with him as I had personal knowledge of Tiruchuzhi. Both of us went to Tiruchuzhi, made all the enquiries and sent a detailed report to the ashram.

Soon afterwards a party consisting of Niranjanananda Swami, his personal attendant Rajagopala Aiyer and Vakil Tata, my father, arrived in Madurai. After the death of Sri Bhagavan's father [in 1892] the house had been sold. Passing through many hands it had come into the possession of a trading community in Tiruchuzhi. They were running a school for which the house had been acquired as trust property. When the ashram people approached them, the owners refused to sell the property by the simple expedient of fixing a price of Rs 10,000. They had recently purchased it for Rs 2,000. The ashram party persisted in their negotiations and after a prolonged stay of about three months they finally secured the property for Rs 3,000, plus a house in Tiruchuzhi itself that cost Rs 2,000. After the negotiations were successfully concluded, the ashram party, along with my father, Vakil Tata, returned to Tiruvannamalai.

At this time my father was sixty-six years old and was suffering from both a hernia and asthma. These troubles had been aggravated by the frequent trips between Madurai and Tiruchuzhi. All these trips were a necessary part of the business negotiations. Soon after reaching Tiruvannamalai his activities caught up with him and he was stricken with another strangulated hernia.

The attack was sudden and severe. It was not possible to take him by car to the Vellore hospital as it was thought that he would probably collapse on the way. The small government hospital close to the ashram did not have the equipment for a

major operation, but there was no other place nearby where a quick remedy could be found. The resident ashram doctor, Kuppuswami Aiyer, a staunch devotee of Bhagavan, took his courage in both hands and improvised an operation table in the local hospital. Before beginning the work he came to Sri Bhagavan and prayed to him for the success of the operation. By the grace of Bhagavan, the operation was quite successful and the patient was soon out of danger. Niranjanananda Swami made adequate arrangements for nursing the patient for all the thirty-two days he remained in the hospital. Every weekend during that period I would leave Madurai on Friday evening by train and return to Madurai after a stay of two days with my father. I could not stay with him on weekdays because of my college work.

Ten days after the operation I received a telegram from the army headquarters in India to the effect that my brother, Narayanaswami, had died as a casualty in the war. I felt that my father, in his weakened condition, would die of shock if he got any inkling of the news. However, when I passed on the news to Bhagavan, he felt that my father should be immediately told about it. He sent Devaraja Mudaliar, the author of *Day by Day with Bhagavan,* along with me to communicate the sad story to my father. Mudaliar gradually gave the news, along with a few comforting words, in such a manner that the force of the shock was diffused. Sri Bhagavan's grace working in my father's mind gave him the strength necessary to withstand the pain produced by the report. A few days later my father was brought back to the ashram quite safe and sound in body and mind.

When it became clear that the life of my father had been spared, I prostrated before Bhagavan and said, 'This one time Sri Bhagavan has worked a miracle and saved my father's life!'

Sri Bhagavan interjected, 'Why are you saying "one time"? Why are you not saying "three times"?'

I was astounded as no other intimation had been given to Sri Bhagavan about the second time my father had been affected with a hernia problem in my village. On that occasion there was only a prayer in Bangalore as a result of the dream I had had. What more proof does one need about the omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence of *Sadguru* Ramana? My father survived the operation that the specialist in Madurai thought would be fatal and lived to a ripe old age of eighty-three.

My father stayed in Sri Ramanasramam after his discharge from the hospital. Chinnaswami wanted to keep my father permanently in the ashram and proposed to build a cottage for my father similar to the one built for Major Alan Chadwick. However, Bhagavan had other plans for him.

Soon afterwards Bhagavan named the house at Tiruchuzhi 'Sundara Mandiram' in memory of his father. Around this time Chinnaswami told Bhagavan of the plan to keep my father as a permanent resident in the ashram.

Sri Bhagavan forbade this plan saying, 'If Tata is kept here, who will take care of the Sundara Mandiram? He should go and live with his son in Madurai and be the manager of the Mandiram at Tiruchuzhi.'

In accordance with this plan my father arrived at my house in Madurai, accompanied by a party of devotees that included Niranjanananda Swami. Amid great festivity, they later installed the portrait of Bhagavan, along with those of his father and mother, in the Tiruchuzhi Sundara Mandiram. The party broke their journey at my house both on their way to and from Tiruchuzhi. I was thus blessed with the favour of being the host of the party during the two days of their stay in Madurai.

In 1946 Niranjanananda Swami and a small group of devotees arrived in Madurai and stayed with my family for about a week. At that time the house in which Bhagavan attained Self-realisation, and which is now known as Sri Ramana Mandiram, was purchased. Vakil Tata took on the additional responsibility of managing the Sri Ramana Mandiram. In this capacity he continued till he left Madurai to live with the family of my brother Ramaswami in Kulithalai, a small town about fifteen kilometres from the village.

In 1944, in the summer vacation, I left my family in Nangavaram, my home village. My wife, our three sons and daughters were living there along with my father. I came to Tiruvannamalai to attend the *mahasamadhi* day of the Mother. The function was on a grand scale. Under the shade of a spacious pandal in the ashram grounds about two thousand poor people of all classes and communities, including women and children, were being feasted. I was one of those controlling the admission of the crowds into the ashram. One group after another was being admitted. While one of the groups was passing through the gates, a harijan woman with a baby in her arms fell down in

the stampede. When she rose up and discovered that the child was limp and lifeless, the woman began to wail and weep aloud.

Feeling her sense of shock I murmured to myself, 'Can this calamity happen at this moment when everyone is so happy? Bhagavan! Please save the life of this child!'

Just then, from somewhere within me, the voice of Bhagavan rose up: 'Will you give up your child in favour of this one?'

Without the least hesitation I replied, 'Yes, Bhagavan, I have given up my child!'

The next moment, after realising what I had promised, I implored Bhagavan with tears in my eyes, 'Dear Bhagavan, please save my child also!'

The woman in the meantime had heard the shriek of her child and rushed off to the feast. When I returned to my village I learned that at the time when this incident was taking place, my little boy Ramanan was miraculously saved from falling into a well when a calf butted against his body.

Some time in March 1948 I had an interesting conversation with Bhagavan. His health was then rapidly declining and his body had lost much weight.

NRK: It is clear that Bhagavan, out of his infinite mercy and grace, cures even the fatal diseases of his devotees. Does not Bhagavan's body suffer on that account?

Bhagavan: (speaking in English) Yes and no.

NRK: Please, Bhagavan, explain in more detail.

Bhagavan: The *mukta purusha* [liberated being] does not need his body once he has realised the Self. However, so long as he stays alive, he has the power to drain off devotees' illnesses into his own body. That is why his body suffers for the time being. That is what is meant by the answer 'yes'.

If he retires into the solitude of a quiet corner and remains in *kevala nirvikalpa samadhi*, completely oblivious of the body-world complex, the disease received in the body gets dissipated. When he returns to his body consciousness the body is cured and restored to its original health. The duration of that *samadhi* should be in adequate proportion to the seriousness of the disease concerned.

Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada, who attained Self-realisation at a very young age with a very healthy and strong body, was engaged in ceaseless activity in the state of *sahaja samadhi*. Out

of his infinite mercy he gave relief to hosts of suffering people who came to him with all sorts of serious diseases. He was continuously active, day and night, and never cared to recoup his health by retiring into the solitude of *kevala nirvikalpa samadhi*. As a result he gave up his body while he was in his early thirties.[13]

On getting this illuminating exposition I groaned in remorse:

[13] In the period that Bhagavan lived in Skandashram he went into a deep *samadhi* almost every day, usually during the daily evening chanting of *Aksharamanamalai*. He would be so deeply immersed in this state, the devotees would find it difficult to rouse him for the evening meal. In *Enadu Ninaivugal* Kunju Swami has related how devotees would shake him and blow a conch in his ear to bring him back to normal. When Bhagavan moved down the hill to Sri Ramanasramam, the frequency of these *samadhis* decreased, and devotees who were in regular contact with him at the end of the 1920s have reported that such instances were down to about two a week. In the 1930s they occurred more rarely. In the last fifteen years of his life such *samadhis* are not reported, though there are frequent mentions of Bhagavan going into a state of deep absorption in the Self. At these times he would sit with open unblinking eyes, utterly immobile.

Up till the mid-1930s Bhagavan appeared to be in vigorous, robust health. In film footage taken in 1935, the earliest available, he looks his age (mid-fifties) and appears to be in a good physical state. In films taken at the end of his life his body looks crippled and feeble, and he appears to be a man who is well into his eighties, rather than a man approaching seventy.

In the light of what Bhagavan told Krishnamurti Aiyer in this conversation, it is tempting to relate Bhagavan's good physical condition prior to 1935 to the *samadhis* that he regularly went into. However, it should also be remembered that visitors and devotees came to him in far fewer numbers during this period. It is possible that his accelerated aging between 1935 and 1950 was due to the far greater numbers of people he had to deal with every day.

This is the only recorded instance I have come across of Bhagavan stating that a period of *samadhi* could eliminate the bodily diseases that were a consequence of taking on the problems of devotees. However, he did on occasion concede that the diseases of his later life could be traced back to his dealings with his devotees.

When a woman asked late in his life if he could not share his physical problems with his devotees in the same way that he insisted on sharing everything else that came his way, Bhagavan laughed and remarked, 'Who do you think gave me these illnesses in the first place?'

'Have I not been a major contributor to the suffering of his body?'

Unfortunately, I got this knowledge rather too late!

On the evening of 10th April, 1950, when I went by train from Madurai to attend to some university business in Madras, I broke my journey at Tiruvannamalai in order to visit Sri Ramanasramam. Sri Bhagavan had only a few more days before dropping his body, yet he insisted on giving *darshan* every day to all his devotees. A long queue extended from his room up to the gate of the ashram. The queue moved slowly past the open doorstep where Sri Bhagavan could be seen in a lying posture facing the devotees. Each devotee stopped for a few seconds before moving on in order to give way to the devotee behind him. I joined the queue. When my turn came I saw Bhagavan's eyes aglow with a penetrating look that pierced into the innermost recesses of my being. He was lying on his side with the bandaged left arm below on the bed. The once beautiful form was reduced to skin and bone. That was the last time I had his blessed *darshan*.

That same evening I had to leave for Madras as I had to conduct the BA degree examinations in the Government Arts College on Mount Road. The examinations were scheduled to continue until the evening of 15th April. As the answer papers had to be evaluated at the end of each day, the authorities of the college had given me a room in an attached hostel that had a veranda facing the road.

On the 14th, after a hard day's work, I had an early meal, went to bed on a bench on the veranda at about 8 p.m., and fell fast asleep. Suddenly I woke up with a start and rushed headlong into my room. A sudden blinding flash of lightning had enveloped me and the vast space around me. It was this startling phenomenon that had caused me to wake up in a panic. Once I reached the room the brilliant flash of light confined itself to my chest. It then subsided into my heart-centre, which began to throb continuously with the sound 'Arunachalam, Arunachalam' in the same way that it used to throb with the sound 'Rama, Rama'. The vibrations of that sound were so violent they shook my whole body. However much I tried, I could not stop that powerful reverberation. Fortunately, by the time the following day dawned, the throbbing had subsided of its own accord.

I went out to take my morning coffee in a neighbouring hotel at daybreak. Going out onto the road I saw a wall poster

announcing in big letters: 'Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi attained *mahanirvana* last night at 8.48 p.m.'

I felt an anguished cry within me: 'I have lost the delight of my eyes, that charming figure of my Bhagavan, for ever!'

That day my co-examiner was alive to my situation. He seated me in a corner of the examination hall and completed the day's work all by himself. The next morning, Sunday the 16th, I arrived at the ashram only to find the blessed body hidden away from human sight forever inside the *samadhi* cell. However, standing beside it I felt the thundering silence of peace eternal. Bhagavan's parting gift to me had been an infusion of grace that had touched the core of my Heart, revealing to me the eternal silence that had always been there, and that will always be there. Through that grace I finally understood who *Sadguru* Ramana was and is, and I understood directly what I had been striving for during all my years of *sadhana*.

The next day I returned to Madurai. I was then in an infinite ocean of pure being that was aware of nothing other than itself. The nescience of sleep was lost for ever. I am now that screen of consciousness on which this endless shadow-play of the world is going on, with a shadow body carrying the label N. R. K. actively engaged in singing the five hymns on Arunachala and Ramana by turns. It has now made this record of its sojourn on earth. In due course this screen and all its contents will disappear into the one Self that stands alone as pure Awareness-Being.

Jai Sri Ramana! Jai Sri Arunachala!

Chalam and Souris

Chalam (1894-1979) was a famous Telugu author whose many works are widely known in Andhra Pradesh, his home state. In addition to writing plays and stories, he also wrote a number of non-fiction works that were aimed at enhancing the status of women in India. He wrote a book that aimed to simplify the Telugu language for children, translated the New Testament into Telugu, and he compiled Bhagavan Smirtulu [Bhagavan Remembered], *a book that recorded the experiences of many of Ramana Maharshi's devotees.*

Chalam was a radical and militant social campaigner when he first encountered Bhagavan in the 1930s. Gradually, over the years that followed, he fell under Bhagavan's spell and finally surrendered to him. He moved to Arunachala in 1950 and spent the remaining thirty years of his life there.

Chalam's daughter Souris accompanied him on many of his early visits to Bhagavan and moved to Arunachala with him in 1950. Since their visits to Sri Ramanasramam largely overlapped, I have intertwined their two separate accounts. Chalam begins by giving his own background.

I was a very orthodox Hindu in high school, even more so than my elders. I used to worship Vishnu, chant *stotras* [hymns in praise of various deities], and when I went to Kakinada to study at the college there, I became a disciple of Ragupati Venkataratnam Naidu Garu [a social and religious reformer]. In my time there all my beliefs in caste, religious ceremonies, temples etc. were shattered. I stopped doing *japa* and all the other traditional practices even though I had to face a lot of hostility both at home and outside. I still wanted to realise the supreme Iswara in my heart, but I felt that my old practices would not help me. Instead, I switched to *bhajans*, prayers and meditation. I did this *sadhana* very intensively and these practices took up a lot of my time.

After my studies I took a job in the same college. I also enrolled as a member of the Brahmo Samaj [a Hindu reform movement], becoming such a dedicated follower, my house became one of

its centres. My personal life, though, was in a mess. I had very strong sexual desires and neither my acts of repentance nor my devotion to God gave me peace and liberation. Instead, my sexual and romantic thoughts became more and more prominent. To gain knowledge about these desires I read many western books on these subjects. These books revolutionised my perspective on life. I left the Brahmo Samaj because the new ideas I had acquired caused me to question the prevailing Hindu view of morality. My doubts about these moral teachings also made me doubt other aspects of Hindu philosophy. I could not see any connection between the idea of an all-merciful God and a world filled with grief, flaws and difficulties. I lost my faith and began to doubt the very existence of God.

I decided that there was no way of knowing whether there was any meaning in the world or the life that went on within it. I concluded that if there was an ultimate truth behind the appearance of the world, that if there was a possible reconciliation between opposing ideas and values, there would be no way of finding it out. I reasoned that man's mind is simply not powerful enough. However much we think, we cannot gain knowledge of ultimate reality. If we try, we merely go round and round in a vicious circle. I came to this conclusion intellectually, but even so, I never gave up my enquiries. Seeking truth became my life's most important activity, even though I felt it was a meaningless quest. I still retained faith that there was something in me that was beyond my mind and my reasoning powers, but I also felt that the solution to the great problems of life and the world was in a place that was inaccessible to me. More than half of my life was spent in this confused state of mind, searching for a truth I knew nothing about. Inevitably, my quest seemed to end in a blind alley. I experienced a causeless mental discontent and had neither joy nor peace in my life.

When I was in this frame of mind, a friend of mine, Sri Dikshitulu, took me in 1936 on a casual visit to Sri Ramanasramam. On the way Sri Dikshitulu asked me to buy some fruit for Bhagavan, but since I had no faith in swamis, I refused. I also refused to prostrate before Bhagavan until Dikshitulu forced me to do it. On this first visit I found it insufferable to sit silently among the people who had come to see Bhagavan. From the moment of our arrival I was pestering

Dikshitulu to take me away from the ashram. The more I watched them, the more my dislike for the people in the ashram increased.

I asked Dikshitulu, 'You say that this Maharshi is a great man who can transform people. But why is it that the people who have attached themselves to him for many years still look like this?'

I stayed only because Dikshitulu forced me to stay.

On the afternoon of the second day I saw Bhagavan coming down the hill. Devotees were standing around in groups, talking to each other. Bhagavan was walking behind the group I was talking with. As he came near everyone except for me stepped aside to give him more room. I stayed where I was because I thought there was more than enough space for him.

As Bhagavan came nearer, Dikshitulu pulled me to one side. Bhagavan walked past me and then suddenly stopped. He turned back, looked at me, gave me a great smile and went on his way. At the time I did not have any particular feeling for him, but when I recollected the incident later, I felt that Bhagavan won my heart in that one brief moment.

An atheist friend of mine, Sri Gora, came to the ashram on the evening of *jayanti* day. We looked at each other with great surprise since neither of us expected to find the other in such a place. He had come to the ashram to investigate what he termed, 'the plunder perpetrated by the Swami'. Feeling that he had found a sympathetic listener, he started listing his complaints against Bhagavan. He abused Bhagavan in strong terms and declared that he was a fraud.

I found myself defending an institution I had already come to loathe.

I said, truthfully, 'I do not see any deceit or plunder here. Those who are giving money do so of their own accord. The ashram does not ask for money from anyone.'

'Why should there be silk mattresses for a yogi?' demanded Gora.

'I don't see any relationship between him and those silk mattresses,' I replied. 'When they are offered to him, he sits on them. If he had to sit on the ground, he would sit there with the same unconcern. Until a few years ago he was living on the hill, sitting on stones.'

Gora paid no attention to my words.

He repeated himself: 'This plundering should be stopped,' and walked away.

I thought to myself, 'When so many types of plunder are prevalent in so many places, why does he get so excited about an innocent place like this?'

I had defended both Bhagavan and the ashram against an unwarranted attack, but I still felt that there was nothing special about Bhagavan or his institution. I was still very anxious to leave. When Bhagavan sat motionless, looking into distant space for hours together, his steadiness, his detachment and the depth of his Self-absorption brought out artistic thoughts in me. But, on the other hand, he looked ugly to me and his voice sounded harsh. I failed to see any softness, compassion or love in his appearance.

One evening, when I could no longer tolerate the atmosphere in the ashram, I went out for a walk. Quite unintentionally, I made a *pradakshina* of the hill. On my return, after the chanting of the *Vedas* was over in the ashram, I sang a song in the hall, again unintentionally. The refrain of the song was '*Prana* Ramana'. The audience was very much impressed and even Bhagavan, it seems, listened attentively.

At last the time came for us to go. Dikshitulu wanted to take leave of Bhagavan and asked me to go along with him.

'What relationship is there between him and me?' I asked. 'Why should I ask for his permission to leave? I will not come with you because I do not follow all these old traditions.'

'All right,' he replied. 'You were a guest of the ashram for three or four days. Won't you at least show the minimum courtesy and say goodbye to him?'

I reluctantly accepted his suggestion and went to the hall with him.

After Dikshitulu had asked Bhagavan for permission to go, I murmured feebly, 'I am also going'.

Bhagavan looked back at me and smiled. That smile caused an unexpected change in me.

I don't know what happened to me except that I suddenly felt Bhagavan was saying to me, 'If you go away, how can I carry on living here? How lonely I will feel!'

My feet refused to move as I considered the idea of staying a little longer. But when I remembered the people, the hall and the silence that had offended me so much, I felt I could not stay

on. I left the ashram, reached the station and there ordered hot toast, poached eggs, tea and cigarettes. I did so in a mood of vengeance as I had been kept away from all these things for all the days I had been at the ashram.

When I reached Vijayawada, my children asked me about the Maharshi. I told them what I had seen and tried to explain Bhagavan's philosophy to them. My words made a strong impression on my elder daughter Souris.

Out of curiosity, I began to practise the enquiry 'Who am I?' Souris also took up the practice after I had explained to her how to do it.

We all moved to Vizhakapatnam shortly afterwards. I continued to sit for meditation there and soon started to get very good results. Often, without any effort on my part, the meditation caught hold of me, made me sit and took me over for a while. At such times my mind used to stop completely. When it became clear to me that it was Bhagavan who was causing this improvement, my faith in him increased and my spiritual hopes were rekindled. I thought, overoptimistically, that I would soon be established in a higher state. In those days I did not know that Bhagavan was just giving me a taste of the experience of the Self in order to increase my faith in him. I did not realise at that time that if I wanted to reach that state by myself, I would have to work very hard and even shed my blood. I did not have much faith in Bhagavan's philosophy, but I still felt that he was leading me somewhere. My attitude was to let him lead me.

Souris now begins her account:

When I saw Bhagavan's photo for the first time in *The Sunday Times,* I wondered who that ugly person could be.

I thought, 'Not only does he get himself photographed half-naked and with a big stomach, he also gets the picture printed in newspapers'.

At the same time I loathed him and what he stood for.

I discovered that his name was Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. The names sounded harsh and artificial to my ears. Bhagavan, Ramana and Maharshi: I did not see any relation between these names. I felt that he had added these titles merely for the sake of self-advertisement, to show himself off.

My aesthetic feelings were so hurt, if I ever saw his photo in

a newspaper I used to turn the page as quickly as possible. A that time, when I was fourteen years old, I couldn't stand the sight of him. But now, today, I know that no other beauty is comparable to the beauty of Bhagavan. It is not merely a feeling, it is a conviction, a sure knowledge. His enchanting smile, his melodious voice, the nod of his head, his wonderful look that splits through the *maya* of the world – these are found nowhere else in the world.

My father went with Sri Dikshitulu for his first visit to Sri Ramanasramam in 1936. On the evening he returned, I was lying down with a headache. Everyone except me crowded round father to listen to his account of Arunachala and Ramanasramam. I initially ignored him, but when I heard him say the name of Arunachala my heart filled with joy. I got up from my bed and sat near father because his story had begun to fascinate me. As I joined him, father was describing Bhagavan's philosophy of Self-knowledge. He was explaining that Bhagavan teaches that the mind, the intellect, the five sensory organs and the body are not real. He told us that Bhagavan taught that we should know the real 'I'. The best *sadhana,* concluded father, is the practice that discovers the real nature of the 'I'.

'How to know the true "I"?' asked my younger brother Vasant.

Father replied, 'Bhagavan says, "Ask yourself who you are".'

'But how does asking this question make us realise the true Self?' my brother asked again.

'It seems he realised the Self by following this method,' replied father lamely, unable to give a more adequate explanation.

Everyone was listening, but except for me, none of us could grasp or understand the ideas that father was trying to explain.

Since my early childhood I had wondered, 'Is the world real or is it a dream? Am I dreaming or awake? Am I imagining the world or does it really exist?'

I had known from childhood that behind my mind there is an 'I' that has no connection with the mind. I had tried unsuccessfully to reach and know this 'I' many times. I knew that the mind was a barrier that prevented the goal from being reached, but I had no idea how to bypass it, how to go beyond the mind and reach the 'I' that was hidden by it. Up till that day I had not found any method that would take me beyond the mind, but when I heard about Bhagavan's teachings from my

father, I felt that they were pointing me in the direction of the truth I was seeking.

I went back to bed and stretched myself out. Father came and sat near me. He applied some *vibhuti* he had brought from the ashram to my forehead and uttered Bhagavan's name twice. I felt a cool power flowing from my father's fingers into my forehead. Immediately my headache disappeared.

Three days later, seeing father sitting on the terrace with closed eyes, we children asked, 'What are you doing?'

He replied, 'I am practising "Who am I?", Bhagavan's teachings on self-enquiry.'

I too felt like doing this *sadhana*, so I read Bhagavan's booklet, *Who am I?* and started to practise the technique.

Vasant also started practising along with us, but after a week he announced, 'It's no use. However much I question, I am not getting any answer.'

'It's not that easy,' said father. 'The mind should disappear completely. Till then you cannot find the answer.'

However, Vasant abandoned his efforts because he lacked perseverance. Father and I, though, carried on, practising both in the morning and the evening.

Bhagavan's philosophy had such a profound influence on me, I began to think, 'Since I am not this body, why should I care for it?'

As a result of thinking like this, I used to neglect both my body and my daily work. Soon afterwards the question, 'Do I want to become a *sannyasin*?' arose in me. The answer at the time was clear: I definitely knew I was not going to leave my people because I knew that I still had much to experience in my life.

At the beginning of my *sadhana*, each time I tried to banish thoughts one by one, ten thoughts would rise in the place of each one I banished. My thoughts rose continuously, one after another, like waves in the ocean.

'When will all these thoughts subside? When will I realise the Self?'

Thoughts like these would arise and make me feel depressed. But ten days after I started my *sadhana*, while I was practising self-enquiry, the figure of Bhagavan appeared before me. Till then I had never seen him, except in photos. Immediately all the thoughts in my mind subsided of their own accord and my

heart filled with joy and love. From that day on, since my mind refused to practise self-enquiry, I started meditating on Bhagavan's form. At first I was afraid that I might be pursuing a wrong path, but later I realised that the appearance of Bhagavan was not a creation of my mind but a manifestation of his grace to make my *sadhana* easy and to lead me further along the path. I soon discovered that without his grace, all *sadhana* is a waste of time. Without his help, attempting to destroy thoughts is as difficult as drying the water in the ocean.

I would have stopped such a difficult *sadhana* on account of my young age, but I soon discovered that the headache that had troubled me since childhood vanished if I meditated.

Whenever I had an attack, if I questioned myself, 'Who is suffering? Is it the body, the mind or the soul?', the suffering would disappear.

Ever since I had read Paul Brunton's *A Search in Secret India,* the desire to see Bhagavan had become more intense in me. His name constantly filled my mind. I noticed that if I practised self-enquiry, there was no tangible result, but if I uttered Bhagavan's name just once, my heart would fill with joy and peace. At that time I used to feel ashamed at the thought that I was falling down from the higher *jnana marga* [path of knowledge] into what I then thought was the lower *bhakti marga* [path of devotion].

Chalam now describes the family's first visit to Sri Ramanasramam:

Souris and her mother had been very keen to see Bhagavan ever since they had heard my account of him. When Souris came to see Bhagavan for the first time in May 1938, she immediately went into a trance. I accompanied her on that trip but I had no spiritual experiences like that. My nerves used to give me some pain when I sat with Bhagavan, but nothing else happened. I used to sit for hours, looking at Bhagavan and hoping that he would do something for me.

Bhagavan certainly noticed me, for he once turned to someone near him and asked, pointing at me, 'Why does he sit like that for hours?'

I assumed that Bhagavan knew that I wanted and needed some spiritual progress. I didn't think there was any need to tell him, so I kept quiet. It had occurred to me to ask him to cure my

headache and to improve my health generally, but then I thought that he must know about this problem as well. I decided that he would cure me if he ever thought that it was necessary. In all the years that I went to see him, I never asked him anything because I had the attitude that he would always give me whatever I needed whenever it was appropriate.

Souris continues:

I spent a whole year yearning to go to Bhagavan before I actually got a chance to see him. At the end of that year I was given, as a birthday present, a trip to Arunachala. My mother and father and my sister, Pakapatha also went on the trip, which took place in the Easter holidays. The moment I saw Arunachala from the train station, my heart filled with joy and happiness. We went from there to the ashram and entered Bhagavan's hall at 8 o'clock in the morning. As soon as he saw me, Bhagavan smiled as if I were an old acquaintance. It seemed to me that he had been expecting me for a long time. I too smiled in the same way. Father prostrated before him. At the time I had not learned how to prostrate, so I watched father and imitated him.

Bhagavan looked just like I had imagined him to be. I sat before him and almost immediately fell into a trance. It was so natural; it was like a fish being put into water.

For the first two days I felt as if I were in heaven, but on the third day, when I got a severe headache after lunch, my heaven turned into a hell. We had decided to stay in the Traveller's Bungalow, which was two miles away from the ashram. We came to the ashram in the morning, stayed there till evening, and then went home. Because we had no accommodation near the ashram, when the headache came there was no place where I could lie down and rest. There were people all around and their noise was all pervasive, so I suffered quite a lot. Initially father and I sat cross-legged on a platform near the well. As I was not used to sitting in this way, I stretched my legs when they began to ache. A little later Bhagavan's sofa was brought out by his attendants and put on the other side of the well. Bhagavan came out soon afterwards and sat on it. We were then disturbed by a person who came up to us and started shouting in Tamil. Since we did not understand Tamil, we had no idea what it was all about. Finally, the man understood that we were incapable of comprehending his message. He came

closer to me and explained with gestures and shouts that I was being disrespectful to Bhagavan by stretching my legs out towards him.

The newness of the place and Bhagavan's silence had made me very sensitive. When the man's harsh behaviour was added to my headache, my mind got angry. Father and I got up from that place and sat at a long distance from Bhagavan on a heap of sand that had been brought for the construction of the dining room.

As I sat there my mind was burning with mutinous thoughts: 'Why did I not stay happily at home instead of coming to these crude people? Bhagavan does not care whether I come here or not. What compassion has he shown towards me? Why should he care for me? He did not even seem to notice that I came a long distance to see him. Why should I face so many difficulties for this Bhagavan, who has been so indifferent to me? There is nothing more foolish than this.'

I told my father about my thoughts and then added, 'I don't like it here. Bhagavan is great, but the other people and the atmosphere of the ashram are very bad. Bhagavan may be great, but what do we gain from that?'

For those first few days father had been hesitant to speak to me about his own difficulties because he had seen me going into ecstasies before Bhagavan. My revolt therefore gave him some consolation. There and then we both decided not to come to the ashram again and not to take Bhagavan seriously in future. Having decided that faith in Bhagavan was foolish, we decided to abandon our spiritual pursuits and live happily without them.

We both wanted to cut short our trip and leave for home. The following day, after lunch, we went to Bhagavan to take leave of him. I saluted him without speaking a word. Bhagavan, who was facing the other way, turned round, looked into my eyes and smiled affectionately. That smile filled my heart with joy and happiness, but we still went ahead with our plan to leave.

From the moment I got into the train, I was anxious to see Bhagavan again. That was my first and last revolt against him. In the years that followed he tested me severely many times. He led me through many insufferable sorrows and difficulties, but my mind never revolted against him again, nor did my faith in him ever waver.

After this visit to Bhagavan my *sadhana* became more intense. I began to experience some fear because my breath used to come out very forcefully with a hissing sound. My body and head would also shake violently when I tried to meditate. It was so severe, I occasionally thought my neck might break. Sometimes I would fall down violently and sometimes my head would get hurt. I even occasionally felt that someone or some presence was hanging around me. At first I thought it was only my imagination, but later on the strength and power of the presence convinced me that it was something real and tangible. Eventually, I came to know that it was Bhagavan's presence. Father wrote to Bhagavan about all these things. The ashram people wrote back saying that there was nothing to worry about and that everything would be all right in the near future. Soon after that the presence disappeared.

Chalam takes up the story again:

In the next three years Souris and I paid several visits to Sri Ramanasramam. She was more enthusiastic than I was. If she had not put so much pressure on me, I doubt if I would have visited so frequently.

I always felt that if I spent some time with Bhagavan my meditation would be deeper, but even though I felt that he could somehow rid me of my troubles and give me happiness, I cannot say that I really enjoyed my time in Bhagavan's presence because I always felt uneasy when I was near him. Souris, on the other hand, always used to go into a trance as soon as she arrived at Arunachala, and she was never willing to leave at the end of our visits. Bhagavan, on his trips in and out of the hall, often used to stop near Souris, look in her direction and smile at her. Souris loved sitting in Bhagavan's presence, but I used to sit there rather unwillingly.

On one of the these trips Bhagavan again asked someone near him, 'Why does he sit there like that?'

Even then I did not speak. At first I was a little annoyed by his question because I assumed he knew why I was sitting there. Later I understood that he was giving me a piece of needed advice.

I felt he was saying, 'What does he gain by merely looking at me. He should make an effort to make progress by himself.'

We usually came with a resolve to stay for days or weeks but

we never managed more than brief stays. It was partly my fault because I always felt an unbearable agitation rise in me whenever I was with Bhagavan. When this happened, I just wanted to get out of the ashram as quickly as possible. I usually felt as if I were caught in the jaws of a demon. Everyone used to say that there was peace in Bhagavan's presence, but I always seemed to be restless. So long as I stayed at Arunachala I could not meditate. Each time I left the ashram, I promised myself that I would never enter it again. But as soon as I left Tiruvannamalai, my mind would yearn again for Bhagavan's *darshan*. I would always return, despite my misgivings, because I always hoped that I would gain something. Though I was never happy at the ashram, some unknown power kept on pulling me back towards Arunachala.

In the three years that I visited Bhagavan regularly, meditation often came to me effortlessly, but I never felt that I was making much progress. I came to the conclusion that my bad health was an obstacle to my development. I tried many treatments, but no one could give me back my good health. Meditation never took away my sufferings, and I found that I had little interest in the various things that had previously given me joy. I reached a point where I became tired of everything. I felt disillusioned with my spiritual life because it had taken away all my pleasures but left my sufferings untouched. In many ways I felt like I was a living corpse.

My path to Bhagavan was a long and arduous one. Having a strong atheist background, I had to undergo many years of doubts and sufferings before I could generate enough faith to accept implicitly that Bhagavan was guiding me and protecting me all the time. Other luckier devotees had faith right from the beginning of their association with Bhagavan. I remember in particular one devotee who had both faith and the intellectual simplicity that I lacked. He was an old Telugu man with a long beard who lived in the Draupadi Temple about 300 metres from Sri Ramanasramam. His only possessions were an iron pot and an axe that he used to cut firewood for cooking. He would beg food in the town and cook it in his iron pot. Each day, for hours together, he could be seen standing and looking at Bhagavan. He would spend the night in the temple, which even then was dilapidated, abandoned and surrounded by jungle. I once found him standing all alone in front of his temple, gazing at

Arunachala. When I asked him what he was doing in such a remote spot, he told me that he slept there.

'What!' I exclaimed, 'You sleep here all alone? Are you not afraid?'

'Afraid of what?' retorted the old man. 'Bhagavan throws his light on me. All through the night I am surrounded by a blue radiance. So long as his light is with me, how can I be afraid?'

This encounter made me deeply humble. Bhagavan's love and light was given in full measure to a poor old beggar, but there were many in the ashram, like myself, who called themselves his devotees, who had failed to receive such grace because we were too busy attending to the contents of our minds.

There was another man, a visitor to the ashram, who impressed me deeply with his faith in Bhagavan. I was sitting in the hall one morning when I heard the tapping of a stick outside. I opened my eyes and discovered that a tall, blind Muslim was trying to find the entry to the hall with his stick. I got up and helped him to come inside.

I made him sit right in front of Bhagavan and told him, 'You are now sitting right in front of Bhagavan. You can salute him if you wish.'

The Muslim followed my advice and then settled down to tell his story. He lived near Peshawar, where he was a teacher of some repute. While he was living there he had happened to hear somebody reading in Urdu about Bhagavan. He at once felt that Bhagavan was his spiritual father and that he must go to him at Tiruvannamalai. Although he was blind, he took the next train and travelled the whole length of India all alone, changing trains many times, till at last he reached Sri Ramanasramam.

When he was asked what he was going to do next, he replied, 'Whatever Bhagavan tells me, I shall do'.

His immense faith made me ashamed of myself. Though he had never met Bhagavan, this blind man had little or no hesitation in placing his life in the hands of an unknown South Indian swami. In my own case, I had to wade through a mountain of doubts and hesitations before I came to Bhagavan's feet in earnest.

I used to spend a lot of time watching Bhagavan in the hall, taking note of the different ways in which he responded to the events that were going on around him. He was always something

of an enigma to me, for I cannot really say that I ever gained a full or even partial understanding of his ways. This is not really surprising since mere devotees cannot comprehend the state of realised souls, nor can they comprehend some of the strange aspects of their lifestyles. There is no standard model for a *jnani*, no yardstick to judge him by. *Jnanis* all tend to differ from each other both in their lifestyles and in the *sadhanas* they prescribe for their devotees. Some realised souls live among men, establish ashrams and train disciples, whereas others roam about the country without ever settling down. Some sing, argue or teach, but others remain perpetually silent. Some live out of human sight, while others get into trouble with ordinary people and suffer from their anger. Even among those who give identical teachings and act in an identical way, some are revered till the end of their lives while others receive only ignominy and insults.

After proper analysis it will be understood that all these differences are not created by the *jnanis* themselves. Nor can external events cause *jnanis* to behave the way that they do. If one considers the matter thoroughly, one will come to the conclusion that it is the Lord himself who causes them to speak and behave in the way that they do. Ordinary men act in response to their mental activities and are thus easily understood by their fellow human beings. *Jnanis* cannot be understood because their minds have been completely destroyed. It is because of this basic difference that the behaviour of *jnanis* differs from that of other, ordinary beings. So, when one looks at how *jnanis* behave with other people, one discovers that their lives are full of contradictory incidents that have no obvious or rational explanation. But not everything about them is inexplicable, for while some of the *jnani's* acts seem to be motiveless, other actions that they perform do have discernible causes.

I mention these things merely to support the notion that there are many things in Bhagavan's life that are beyond our comprehension. Those who cannot accept that he is a superhuman being who has gone beyond all dualities, and has consequently become the Lord himself, cannot understand him. It is sheer ignorance on our part to search for an explanation for the contradictions in his behaviour or to criticise apparent inconsistencies in his life. Bhagavan used to speak and behave according to the need, the state and the situation of each person.

Since we are not aware of these factors, we are in no position to pass judgement on him.

We do not, for example, know how far he was involved in the things that were happening around him in the ashram. There was apparent involvement, and yet at the same time there was no involvement. Even while he was working, Bhagavan could say with complete honesty and accuracy, 'I do nothing,' because there was no 'I' in him to take responsibility for the activities that the body went through.

On a larger scale one can ask, 'Is the Lord responsible or not for the inhumanities or injustices in the world?'

Bhagavan might answer such a question by saying, 'All acts are the activities of the Lord, yet the Lord himself does nothing. He simply is.'

For the *ajnani* [unenlightened one] this is a nonsensical, insoluble paradox, but for a *jnani* like Bhagavan, it is a simple statement of fact.

The *jnani's* paradoxical statements about his responsibility for the activities that his body performs should make us very wary about judging his actions. How can we blame, criticise or compliment a man for an activity that was not his, and for which he was in no way responsible? And since there is no 'I', no sense of individuality left in the *jnani*, how can we attach praise or blame to someone or something that does not really exist, except in our own minds?

Bearing all these things in mind, it will be instructive to list a few of Bhagavan's acts and attitudes. I do not intend to offer definitive explanations for them. They are merely examples of Bhagavan's inexplicable manifestation among us.

Since Bhagavan's relationship with the institution that grew up around him perplexed many visitors, I will deal with that first.

The ashram managers did many things without asking for Bhagavan's permission because they knew that Bhagavan would disapprove of their actions. Although Bhagavan knew these things were going on, he would not take cognizance of them until they were brought to his attention. Sometimes, when he was informed of such activities, he would call the concerned person or persons and scold them, but at other times he would not bother to say anything at all.

His attitude to the ashram management varied wildly. He

would generally back up Chinnaswami, the ashram manager, in all the disputes he had with devotees. If devotees complained to him about the management of the ashram, he would criticise them for complaining, even if they seemed to have a legitimate grievance. But Bhagavan himself often rebuked Chinnaswami for various defects in the ashram's administration. I was told that once, in the early years of the ashram, he even went as far as to beat him with a stick. He apparently hit him so hard that the stick broke.

Chinnaswami avoided coming into Bhagavan's presence as much as possible. His attempts to keep out of Bhagavan's sight were so obvious and so frequent, he gave the impression of being a guilty offender, hiding from justice.

Though all these things were well known, Bhagavan always publicly supported Chinnaswami and discouraged devotees from complaining about him. Sometimes visitors to the ashram would point out to Bhagavan what they perceived to be the inhumanities, the acts of injustice, the favouritism and the extortion of money that they believed were perpetrated in the ashram.

To such people Bhagavan would simply say, 'Why have you come here? Have you come from such a long distance just to sort out the lapses in this ashram?'

Sometimes these visitors would then complain that making money had become the chief concern of the ashram, and that this money was misused.

Bhagavan would tell such people, 'They [the officials against whom all these allegations were made] have come here for the sake of money. If you are also after money, why don't you join them, ask for a share and see if you can get some?'

From remarks like these it would appear that Bhagavan was fully aware that there were irregularities in the ashram management, but he never sympathised with people who tried to bring them to his attention.

Bhagavan was not at all concerned with the way the monthly collections offered in his name were spent by the ashram. He did not mind if people voluntarily donated money to the ashram, but he detested the prevalent practice of begging for money in his name. Lakhs of rupees were spent on the construction of the Mother's temple, and a substantial amount of that expenditure was raised through begging. Bhagavan complained about this

many times, but his advice was not heeded. He even gave orders that the begging must stop, but the orders were ignored. But, paradoxically, when the temple construction went ahead with money collected by methods he strongly disapproved of, he supported the project whole heartedly. At night he would take a torch and inspect each new stone very carefully. And when the temple construction was finally completed, he presided over the ceremony that took place when the Sri Chakra was installed there. He also acceded to requests that he preside over the *kumbhabhishekam* [consecration] ceremony of the temple, and on a few occasions he attended various acts of ritual worship that were conducted at the shrine.

He did all this even though it was well known that he never cared for ritual worship, festivities and processions. He particularly disliked people offering flowers, breaking coconuts and waving *arati* in front of him in an attempt to worship him as a god, but when the *arati* was waved before the temple idols and brought to him, he would take it and apply *kumkum* and *vibhuti* to his forehead just like everyone else. When Bhagavan was very ill in his last days, devotees performed or arranged *homas* to the planets in order to prolong his life. Though such people did not understand that these procedures were alien to Bhagavan's teaching, Bhagavan never interfered with their activities. In fact, he happily took the holy water and the *prasad* from these *homas* when they were presented to him.

People often came up to Bhagavan and prostrated before him. Bhagavan would not even turn his head to look at some of these people. But when other people came, he would suddenly look benignly at them, bringing down his gaze from some far-off eternal void where it had previously been dwelling. When such favoured people came, he would very kindly enquire in great detail about their welfare. Over the years I noticed that he was especially kind to those who came from far-off countries, old people and children. One devotee once asked Bhagavan why he ignored a lot of visitors who came to see him.

This devotee remarked, 'So many prostrate before you every day but you don't even bother to look at most of them.'

'What do you know about these things?' retorted Bhagavan, angrily. 'Before they salute me, I salute them internally.'

Bhagavan often showed this kind of disapproval when

devotees brought complaints to him. Even mild complaints could provoke a critical rebuke.

Once, for example, a visitor came to Bhagavan early one morning and remarked, 'Throughout the night a dog was barking. It was making so much noise, I was unable to meditate.'

Bhagavan responded by saying, 'No dog barked. It was your mind that barked.'

Many different types of people came to see Bhagavan: high officials, lowly beggars, rich people, ascetics, devout pilgrims, pretty women, and many more besides. All of them wanted Bhagavan's attention, but none of them ever discovered a way of ensuring that they got it. Some who came with many questions could not manage to get even a single word from him. But while they were trying, Bhagavan might unexpectedly call out to someone else, enquire about his welfare and talk with him about many things. Sometimes Bhagavan would get irritated with someone for no apparent reason and treat him very harshly. Some people would be scolded or made fun of in front of every one else till all present laughed at them.

Once when a devotee went home after visiting Bhagavan he had a dream in which Bhagavan asked him to come back to the ashram. It was not convenient for the devotee to return, but nevertheless he still rushed back to the ashram. He went straight to the hall but Bhagavan did not even bother to look at him. For several days Bhagavan neither smiled at him nor enquired about his welfare. During those days Bhagavan talked in an animated way to many other devotees. He spoke to them all with great love and made many enquiries about their well-being, but the returning devotee was ignored.

Bhagavan would often give a lot of attention to people who, to my eyes, were merely showing off. I saw one man, who seemed to be filled with self-importance, holding a book and a pencil and paper in front of him. He put a question to Bhagavan and then looked around at the audience with an obvious show of great pride. Bhagavan, surprisingly, spoke to him at great length on quite an insignificant matter. But while this was going on, other people who had come from a distant place and who were in a hurry to go back there had to wait for a number of days to have their doubts cleared.

The events, activities and dialogues in the hall often seemed, to uninformed observers, to have a bizarre or irrational

character, but that was only because they were not aware that the power of Bhagavan orchestrated the scene in such a way that everything that needed to happen happened automatically. One inexplicable incident might be a message for one devotee in the hall. That devotee might understand the import of the message and consequently find his devotion or faith increasing. The rest of us, not knowing the full circumstances, would merely be bewildered. Or, in another case, Bhagavan might notice that the ego of a devotee sitting before him was rising and rebuke him in some way. The others in the hall might interpret this as an unprovoked attack, but from Bhagavan's point of view, it was what that devotee needed at that particular time.

I myself witnessed one incident that produced a reaction in Bhagavan that was only understood by two people. A friend of mine called Dharmapuri, who had no faith in swamis, came to see Bhagavan. Having decided in advance not to prostrate to Bhagavan, he spent the whole of his brief visit wandering around the ashram instead of sitting with Bhagavan in the hall. In the evening, as it was summer, Bhagavan's chair was placed outside near the well. Bhagavan came and sat on it and all the devotees sat on the floor near him. Dharmapuri was wandering in the area at that time. When he saw Bhagavan sitting there, he felt an irrepressible desire to prostrate before him. His determination not to prostrate vanished as he fell full length at Bhagavan's feet. Bhagavan noticed his performance and laughed loudly. None of the devotees, except for me, knew why Bhagavan had suddenly laughed. Everyone else was looking around, trying to ascertain the cause of Bhagavan's laughter.

Bhagavan occasionally surprised us all by saying, in all seriousness, that *jnanis* and *siddhas* occasionally took the form of animals that came to visit him in the ashram. Annamalai Swami told me about one incident in which one of these strange animals appeared to some of Bhagavan's devotees. On a moonlit night some devotees were going around Arunachala, chanting the *Vedas*. At one place they saw a leopard standing in the middle of the road, looking at them. The singers were understandably paralysed with fear. They could neither sing, walk ahead nor run away. The leopard looked at them quietly for a long time before slowly crossing the road and disappearing into the jungle. The devotees, thinking that they had had a lucky escape, completed their circuit of the hill and returned to the ashram.

Bhagavan listened carefully while they recounted the story of their meeting with the leopard.

Then he surprised them by remarking, 'There was no reason for fear. The leopard was a *jnani* who came down the hill to listen to you chanting the *Vedas*. He went away deeply disappointed because out of fright, you broke off your singing. Why are you afraid of such things?'

A significant number of Bhagavan's devotees were orthodox brahmins. Because of the caste rules that governed their lives, they ate in a separate enclosure in the dining room and only ate food that had been cooked by fellow brahmins. Bhagavan never objected to this arrangement, but he did show his disapproval if any of the brahmins looked down on, or were antagonistic toward, members of the lower castes. Traditionally, brahmins had always regarded themselves as a superior breed but Bhagavan would not allow such attitudes to flourish in the ashram.

There was one brahmin woman in the ashram who considered herself to be an important devotee. She could never assimilate this aspect of Bhagavan's teaching. She avoided all non-brahmins because she felt that any contact with them would pollute her in some way. I once saw her accost a stranger who was trying to take some water out of a drum in the ashram.

'Who are you?' she demanded. 'Do you know whose water that is?'

She wanted to throw him out of the ashram because she felt that by dipping a container into this water he had contaminated the ashram's water supply, merely because he belonged to a lower caste than she. If this woman was ever touched by a non-brahmin, she would go up to Bhagavan and touch him. She felt that a brief physical contact with Bhagavan would purify her of the contamination she believed she suffered whenever non-brahmins touched her. As the years went by and the numbers of visitors increased, she found it harder and harder to make physical contact with Bhagavan.

Once, on a *jayanti* day, someone touched her accidentally.

She immediately went up to Bhagavan and said, 'Bhagavan, A sudra [a member of the lowest caste] has just touched me. Please touch me so that the impurity will go away.'

'Go away! I will not touch you!' said Bhagavan angrily.

'But did you not touch your mother?' she asked.

'I might have done,' replied Bhagavan, 'but I will not touch you.'

The important devotee was thus left in her 'polluted' condition.

The woman referred to Bhagavan's mother because it was well known that she too had had a strong attachment to traditional brahmin habits and customs. When she had come to live by the side of her son, she had been a very orthodox lady, full of caste prejudices, superstitions and possessive pride. Bhagavan did not tolerate any of her ideas on caste. He criticised her many times and was quite ruthless in destroying all that stood in the way of her emancipation from ignorance and fear. He succeeded wonderfully and gave his mother *videha mukti* [liberation at the moment of death].

One of her pet aversions was onions, which are taboo to brahmin widows.

When she would refuse to cook them, Bhagavan would show her one and say, 'How mighty is this little bulb! It can stop my mother from going to heaven.'

His mother would then go and cry in some corner, but he would show her no sympathy.

Instead he would call out to her, 'Cry! Cry! The more you cry, the better!'

Bhagavan's taunts were really a manifestation of his love. In his eagerness to bestow his grace on her, he was merciless with every obstacle, however sacred or rooted in tradition, that was impeding her spiritual progress.

On many occasions the ashram manager made up rules and tried to impose them on Bhagavan himself. Once, for example, the ashram authorities decided to impose a rule that nobody should disturb Bhagavan between 12 noon and 2 p.m. Without even consulting Bhagavan, the doors of the hall were closed during that time, with Bhagavan on the inside.

When Bhagavan enquired about the reason for this rule, he was told, 'Bhagavan, it is for the sake of your health'.

Bhagavan told them that the closure was not necessary, but when they still persisted in closing the doors, Bhagavan reacted by leaving his hall during this period and sitting outside the closed doors. The ashram authorities then pleaded again with Bhagavan to accept their arrangement. Finally, after listening to all their pleas, he agreed to let them have their way.

Bhagavan frequently made it clear that he did not want devotees to be prevented from coming to see him, but when he was very sick, the ashram manager took the matter into his own hands and prevented all devotees from going to see him. In Bhagavan's last days guards were placed outside his room and given strict orders that no one should be allowed to disturb him. There was some justification for this since Bhagavan had only recently undergone one of his many operations. A *sadhu* then arrived and asked for an audience. The guard explained the situation and informed him that his request could not possibly be granted. The *sadhu* went to the office and made a similar request there, saying that he had to leave the same day and that he could not wait for Bhagavan's recovery. The office staff turned down his request as they were not willing to countermand the doctors' orders. The *sadhu* accepted the decision and started walking sadly from the office towards the gate. Bhagavan must have overheard his request, for when the *sadhu* passed Bhagavan's room he was astonished to find that Bhagavan was standing outside, waiting for him. The *sadhu* went up to him and they gazed at each other silently for about ten minutes. Then the *sadhu* went on his way and Bhagavan returned to his room.

Devotees frequently brought many food items to Bhagavan at all times of the day without bothering to consider the effect they might have on his digestion. Bhagavan would eat a sample of many of the offerings and then put up with the consequent suffering. But all the offerings were not treated equally. He might eat the offering of one devotee even if it was a large amount, but on other occasions he would completely reject offerings that were well-prepared and that seemed to have been offered with great devotion. Sometimes a devotee would place his offering in front of Bhagavan and stand before him for hours together, but Bhagavan would not even deign to look at him. Many devotees had to go away disappointed because no one could make Bhagavan accept a gift that he had decided to reject. It was hard to discern any pattern in such behaviour. He might eat a devotee's offering one day and then reject a similar offering from the same devotee on the following day.

Bhagavan's unpredictable eating habits can be illustrated by a wonderful story that was told to me by Subramanian, one of the kitchen workers. About two years before his death, Bhagavan was sitting in the hall, surrounded by devotees. Everyone was

hungry. The lunch bell had already gone and some devotees were already in the dining room, waiting for Bhagavan to come. Bhagavan had been delayed by his rheumatic knees. Before he could move, he had had to rub them for some time. Eventually, after he had finished his brief massage, he got up slowly, leaned on his stick, and started moving towards the door. He was about to pass through the doorway when he noticed a village milkman, wrapped in a cotton shawl, with a mud pot hanging from a strap on his shoulder.

Bhagavan stopped, looked at him and exclaimed with surprise, 'Look! Is it not Chinnapayan?'

'Yes it is I, Swami,' the villager replied with devotion and respect.

'How are you?' asked Bhagavan. 'Are you well? Have you come to see me? You seem to be very well. What is in your pot? Have you brought some *koolu* [millet gruel] with you?'

'Yes, Swami,' replied the milkman shyly, 'I have brought some *koolu* for you.'

'Then come on, let me have it,' said Bhagavan.

He put down his stick, cupped his two hands together and bent forward, holding his hands near his lips. The milkman started pouring the porridge from his pot in a thin stream into Bhagavan's hands. As Bhagavan sipped at it with his chin between his wrists, the poor man's face beamed with joy. Bhagavan drank steadily, as if the grey porridge were nectar to him.

The dining room was full of hungry people. Some of them were also a little annoyed because no food could be served until Bhagavan arrived and took his seat. One of the visitors who had been sitting there came out to see what had caused Bhagavan's delayed arrival. When he remarked that everyone was waiting for him in the dining room, Bhagavan grew indignant.

'What! Do you think that I am here for your sake alone? Do I belong to you? Did you care for me when I was living on the hill? Nobody wanted me then except for shepherds like this Chinnapayan who would share their *koolu* with me.'

Bhagavan then invited the milkman to come and eat with him and accompanied him into the dining room.

India has long been riddled with caste and social prejudices. Bhagavan, who was well aware of this, would rebuke devotees if he found them maltreating poor or low-class people. He was

a great champion of the oppressed, and he had a natural tendency to side with the social underdog in any dispute. This came out very clearly in an entertaining exchange I witnessed in the hall.

A devotee had asked Bhagavan, 'Siva is sometimes called "The Lord of the Thieves". Why does God have such a name? Is Siva a Lord of Thieves?'

Bhagavan replied by saying, 'Before they go out on their professional work, some thieves go to a Siva temple and promise to give the Lord half of their booty if they are successful. After their work is over, they honour their promise and surrender the promised goods to God. There are many so-called good devotees who have far less of a commitment to God. They either never make any promises to God, or if they do, they fail to keep them. So in some ways, thieves are more sincere devotees of the Lord than ordinary people.'

Bhagavan's demeanour changed periodically. When he sat looking out beyond the horizon, he would remind us of Lord Dakshinamurti in the *dhyana* [meditation] posture. When he sat like that, his effortless pose was so infinitely artistic we could not turn our eyes away from the spectacle. We felt that we were looking at an unchanging, unmoving sunrise. Normally, neither his facial features nor his limbs ever looked beautiful to me because I had been accustomed to appreciate a different kind of beauty. But when Bhagavan sat in this majestic unmoving posture, which he often did, there was unspeakable beauty and grace in his figure. Not only that, something beyond our accustomed sense and idea of beauty used to illuminate his being. Wearing only a loincloth he would bring to our minds an emperor wearing magnificent robes, sitting on a diamond-studded throne with all the paraphernalia of his estate. But then, when somebody called 'Bhagavan,' he would come down from some unknown region to this earth to attend to the call. I say 'come down', but what is coming down or otherwise to he who is all pervading?

We all thought Bhagavan looked very elegant in his *kaupina* [loincloth], but near nakedness was a little disconcerting to some of the foreign visitors.

When Duncan Greenlees, a distinguished British scholar, came to see Bhagavan for the first time, he confessed to one of the residents, 'My sister wishes to come from England to visit me. I

have written to her and told her many things about Bhagavan and Gandhi. I have told her that she should see both of them because they are the two greatest men in India. But if she decides to come, how can I show them to her? Both are almost naked and neither is particularly attractive from a physical point of view. If I tell her that these two are the greatest men in India, what will she think of India?'

Although Bhagavan was half-naked and lived in a very unostentatious way, most people were afraid to approach him to speak with him. Important men such as senior army officials, or extremely proud people who held important jobs in other fields – even people like these trembled and were afraid to go up to that decrepit old form that had neither temporal power nor even a significant following.

Bhagavan used to go up the hill three or four times a day. He would walk slightly ahead of his attendant, or an accompanying devotee, who would follow him and carry his water pot. They would climb slowly, step by step. Occasionally Bhagavan would stop either to have a look at the mountain or to speak a few words to his attendant. Those like myself who stayed below would look up at him with unwavering gaze till he disappeared at a turning. Each time he disappeared like that we used to wonder if he would climb and disappear into the sky, never to return.

Bose and Yogi Ramaiah once accompanied Bhagavan for some distance on one of his walks up the hill. While they were waiting for him to return, Yogi Ramaiah told Bose that it would be a good idea to make a cement platform for Bhagavan to rest on.

On his return Bhagavan was told of the idea, but he turned it down, saying, 'Don't do it. If you construct a platform here, somebody else will come along and erect a temple on it.'

Gurus like Bhagavan are manifestations of God in a human form. To relieve and redeem the suffering of mankind, the Lord occasionally comes down to earth and manifests in a physical form. He accepts many people as his disciples and purifies them by bestowing his grace on them. Though such a Guru is a manifestation of God, each will deal with his devotees in different ways. The teachings of these Gurus often differ from or contradict the doctrines, customs, traditions and ethics of the people among whom they have taken their birth, but however much the Guru deviates from traditional orthodoxy, it is the devotee's job to

have implicit trust in him and unquestioning obedience to his teachings. Many devotees leave their Guru because they are unable to accept teaching or behaviour patterns that contradict their age-old beliefs. Some others are attracted to the Guru to the extent that they are unable to leave him, but at the same time they find themselves unable to accept or practise his teachings or teaching methods. Such devotees, suffering from a clash of allegiances, stay in the Guru's ashram but often avoid having direct contact with him. Such people could be seen at Sri Ramanasramam.

Bhagavan upset the traditional beliefs of many of his devotees because he rarely followed orthodox customs. He tried hard to get some of his devotees to give up their traditional practices, but he was not always successful. Many devotees felt proud to be his followers. They felt that they had found a great Guru and praised him as a manifestation of God on earth, but they were unable to accept his advice when it came to giving up traditional activities. They would carry on with their accustomed daily worship, they would perform *pujas* on special occasions, they would make offerings to the gods if they wanted their desires to be fulfilled, and they would go on pilgrimages to gain spiritual merit or to wash away their sins.

Bhagavan would tell such people, 'There is no need of such activities. Just be still. Being still is the greatest pilgrimage one can undertake. Do you wish to visit Benares? Where is a greater pilgrimage centre than Arunachala? This is the Himalayas. This is Kailash [the home of Siva] itself!'

In spite of such assurances from Bhagavan, devotees would still go on pilgrimages.

Though Bhagavan occasionally made disparaging remarks about traditional practices such as idol worship, he did not like his devotees to criticise such activities. If they did, he would not support them.

Once, for example, someone asked Bhagavan, 'Is it not foolish to make idols and worship them when we know that God is formless?'

Bhagavan answered in a characteristic way by saying, 'Who is not doing idol worship? From the moment of waking in the morning, everyone is engaged continuously in idol worship. How? By taking the body, which is only a mental image, to be real and by treating it like a temple statue. You bathe it, comb

its hair and offer food to it three times a day. Who has escaped from this idol worship?'

Echammal, who was one of Bhagavan's greatest devotees, once performed a *puja* with one lakh [100,000] leaves and with great pride told Bhagavan all about it.

Bhagavan remarked, 'Instead of pinching the plant so many times, could you not pinch your own skin one lakh times and perform the *puja* that way?'

Bhagavan felt that this *puja* had been an insensitive act because it had inflicted an unnecessary amount of pain and damage on the trees that provided the leaves.

Sometimes Bhagavan would be indifferent to all the events that were going on around him, but at other times he would show a keen interest in the trivia of everyday life.

At one time he took great care of a baby squirrel that had lost its mother, and when a sparrow's egg fell down from its nest, Bhagavan picked it up and took good care of it until the baby sparrow emerged. Afterwards he happily showed the baby sparrow to everyone. Then, after showing interest in such minor things, he might reply, uninterestedly, 'Oh, is that so?' if it was reported to him that someone who was considered to be a close devotee had passed away. When books were being bound or a cupboard was being constructed, Bhagavan would supervise the work very carefully. He would often annoy the people who were making them by insisting that all measurements be accurate to a hundredth of an inch. He had the same attitude towards the ashram cooking. He would give detailed instructions to the cooks and ask them to follow them implicitly. To ensure that his orders were being complied with, he would inspect their work from time to time. In contrast to this attitude, if any valuable items were spoilt or missing, he would show no reaction when details of the losses were brought to him.

Once, for example, a devotee brought an expensive clock as a present and placed it on the table in front of Sri Bhagavan, saying, 'I want Bhagavan to use this clock to tell the time'.

Four days later the clock mysteriously disappeared. The donor was so upset over the loss, he came and cried in front of Bhagavan. Bhagavan did not speak to the devotee, but he asked the people around him to find out what had happened to the clock. It was soon discovered that a close relative of Bhagavan had taken it away, intending to keep it for himself.

'Oh,' said Bhagavan dismissing the whole incident, 'We should at least be glad that he let us keep the clock here for four days.'

When large crowds thronged the ashram, the attendants would violently push away the surging crowd of devotees, many of whom were women, with large wooden poles. In Bhagavan's presence important people would fight for the right to sit near him. New visitors would occasionally be turned away from the dining room, without being served any food. Bhagavan would be aware of all these things, but he would watch them all disinterestedly, without interfering. While all these things were going on, he might be attending, with great care, to the welfare of a plant or an injured bird. If he was protecting a plant or bird in this way, he would get extremely annoyed if devotees caused any further harm to it.

Bhagavan gave the impression that he was above all the mundane things that went on around him. We used to feel that for most of the time he was unconcerned with all the activities that went on in the ashram. But occasionally he would draw our attention to some minor defect in the ashram and give us a lengthy lecture on it.

Bhagavan was never impressed by the achievements, reputation or pedigree of the people who visited him. Visitors might have wealth, beauty and power; they might be famous or have a reputation for philanthropy or selflessness; they might have done a lot of *sadhanas* or *tapas*, but it made no difference when they appeared before Bhagavan. When many people like this came, he would not even raise his eyes to look at them. Sometimes, when new people were introduced to him, he would take no notice of them. Instead, he would smile at someone else and enquire about his welfare. Sometimes he would laugh and show great love towards particular devotees, but at other times he would be totally indifferent to the same people. When some visitors came, he would come down to their level and answer each silly question they put with great patience, but he would not even open his mouth if the same question were put by someone else.

Someone might ask, 'Bhagavan, are there other worlds?'

Bhagavan would answer him, 'Who is he that asks the question?'

But if someone else asked the same question later that day,

he might give a talk on the meaning of death and give a detailed description of other worlds.

Bhagavan would generally ignore questions that he did not want to answer, but on a few rare occasions he responded with a show of great anger.

Someone once came from Guntur and asked him, 'When this *yuga*[1] ends, what have you decided to do? Will you go into *jiva samadhi* [a kind of suspended animation that can continue for immense periods of time], or will you keep your body in ordinary *samadhi*?'

Bhagavan responded very angrily, 'Who are you? Have you come to test me? Are you competent to test my ability? Get out of here!'

So saying, he got up and chased him out of the hall.

Those who came to Bhagavan reacted in various ways. Some would immediately go into a deep meditation, whereas others would go away unimpressed. Some visitors would laugh or weep or cry out loudly that they were sinners. Some would shout while others would go into hysterics. Occasionally visitors would fall down and lose consciousness. Sometimes new people would start praising him, or they might recite verses, or come up with extempore poems in praise of him. Some new people would run up to him and try to embrace him while others would be content with prostrating innumerable times. Many people tried to touch his feet or press them to their eyes. Not all the responses were favourable. Occasionally visitors reviled or derided him. They would question his greatness and deliberately flout his instructions or wishes. Some would sing songs before him while others, unimpressed with his aloofness, would ask him to come down from his pedestal and serve mankind. I have even seen people kick themselves and have convulsions in his presence.

I met one woman called Marakadamma who automatically responded to Bhagavan's grace in a very peculiar way. She often came to visit Bhagavan but she used to be very restless in his presence. When she arrived, she would salute Bhagavan once, leave the hall and wander around for a while. After some time she would come back, prostrate to him again and then leave

[1] According to Hindu cosmology, we are in the Kali Yuga, an immense epoch of time that is due to end in the far-distant future with the dissolution of the whole physical universe.

the hall to carry on with her wandering. As her love towards Bhagavan gradually intensified, she began to feel a great urge to go up to him and embrace him. Her restlessness sprang from her attempts to control this urge. Occasionally she would succumb, rush up to Bhagavan and embrace him.

At first the attendants were content to drag her away and deposit her at a suitable distance from Bhagavan's sofa but when she persisted with this practice they used to chase her out of the hall. Eventually, in an attempt to discourage her, they started hitting her if she ever came near Bhagavan. None of these punishments cured her of her habit or her desires. Irrespective of what the attendants did, she still felt an overwhelming urge to run towards Bhagavan and hug him.

She once told me, 'Bhagavan used to create in me some uncontrollable reaction. It seems to me that he is always calling me to come and fall on him. At the same time, he seems to incite great anger in his attendants whenever I come near him. I feel that he is also sending a silent message to his attendants: "Look! Marakadamma is coming! Beat her!"'[2]

Bhagavan usually ignored the more extreme forms of behaviour that took place in the hall. Occasionally, if visitors got over-excited, he would look at them for a while and calm them down. I saw him do this to a woman from Andhra Pradesh who had clearly taken a keen interest in women's welfare. She stood up in the hall and started speaking to Bhagavan as if she were addressing a public meeting.

'The whole world is treating women very badly,' she began. 'Do you treat them the same way?'

Bhagavan did not even bother to look in her direction.

The woman continued, 'Should a woman's life be spent in

[2] Bhagavan was not the sole recipient of this behaviour. Lakshmana Swamy, who lived in Palakottu from 1949 to 1950, once told me that she used to hide outside his room, hoping to ambush him with a hug whenever he came out. He said that for a while he had to vary his routine every day in order to avoid her. Other *sadhus* were given the same treatment.

I encountered this lady in the 1970s at Sri Ramanasramam. She would wait outside the meditation hall and try to give fruit and hugs to men, including me, who had spent a long time meditating there. On one occasion, she asked me to give her the mat I was then meditating on. When I refused, she physically tried to pull it out from underneath me while I was sitting on it. She passed away a few years later.

the kitchen? Should she do no more than give birth to children and raise them? Is there nothing else for women to do?'

Bhagavan ignored her harangue and carried on gazing into space. The woman then began to criticise Bhagavan more directly.

'Is liberation only for men? Even people like you show partiality towards men. Are yoga and meditation for men only?'

Her emotional state and Bhagavan's apparent indifference to her brought tears to her eyes.

Finally Bhagavan turned his face towards her with a questioning look that seemed to ask her why she was so troubled and agitated. The woman, who was accustomed to giving thundering speeches from public platforms, began to melt as Bhagavan gazed steadily at her, without speaking.

After some time the woman, in a faltering and far less arrogant tone, asked, 'Bhagavan, will you not show a path to liberation that is suitable for women?'

Bhagavan kept up his steady gaze and asked, 'What is liberation?'

His question finally silenced the woman. She immediately sat down and abandoned her questioning and speech-making without even formulating an answer to Bhagavan's simple question. Shortly afterwards she left the ashram and never came back.

Visitors who had been refused by the ashram management would sometimes go directly to Bhagavan and complain. In such circumstances he would often completely ignore the complaint.

Or, alternatively, he might say, 'What authority have I got here? I am also at their mercy when it comes to getting food. If they turn me away from the dining room, I too will have to go away.'

But at other times, when visitors asked him for food, he would call to someone nearby and instruct him to feed them properly. With some visitors he would not even wait to be asked. He would ask them if they had eaten, and if they had not, he would instruct them to go to the dining room and eat.

When the ashram started to become prosperous, Bhagavan insisted that he would not go to eat in the dining room until all the poor people at the gate, the cows and the other animals that were awaiting food, had been fed. If the ashram prepared

specially diluted *sambar* for the poor, Bhagavan would get angry and insist that he be fed the same inferior-quality *sambar* with his own meal. In this way he ensured that the local poor people were always fed good-quality food. He even insisted that the ashram authorities feed the cows the same type of *iddlies* that were served to him. The ashram management did not approve of this. They went against his wishes and then tried to hide their disobedience from Bhagavan. Bhagavan finally got so irritated by this kind of behaviour, he stopped trying to interfere in such matters.

However, he could always be relied upon to show anger if he was given extra food in the dining room. Even when he was ill, he would insist that the fruit and milk that were given to him for medicinal reasons should be distributed among all those present in the hall. He would also distribute any medicines he received in the same way. His attitude was, 'If it is good for me, it must be good for everyone else as well'. I heard an amusing story about one of Bhagavan's attempts to doctor everyone in the ashram. It seems that he once asked all the devotees to take a dose of castor oil as a laxative. Muruganar, one of Bhagavan's leading devotees, declined to take his dose.

When the news of his refusal was conveyed to Bhagavan, Bhagavan remarked, 'If he doesn't want to drink it, what can we do? Give his dose to me.'

Bhagavan then drank Muruganar's portion along with his own. The extra dose had no effect on Bhagavan, but Muruganar was soon afflicted by diarrhoea and had ten motions in the next few hours.

Bhagavan never tolerated the attempts of visitors to give him special treatment. Often, he would not even settle for equality with his devotees. He would sometimes say that devotees should be treated better than he. If Bhagavan ever noticed that devotees were being unequally treated in the dining room, or that he was receiving more of something than anyone else, he would sometimes make his displeasure known by giving up various items in his diet. One day at lunch, the servers noticed that Bhagavan had refused to accept any buttermilk.

Devaraja Mudaliar, who often used to sit near Bhagavan in the dining room, also noticed this and complained: 'Bhagavan, we are all eating sumptuously, but every time you eat, you omit some part of the meal. How can we eat happily and well when

we can see that you are deliberately eating less than we are?'

Bhagavan replied, 'What does Bhagavan lack? The servers pay no attention to whether Bhagavan requires a lot or a little food. They always put a large mound of food on his plate. But the servers are not equally liberal when they serve his devotees.'

Because Bhagavan usually only gave up particular items in his meal when he noticed that devotees were not receiving the same amount as he was, or were not being served properly, the servers came to the conclusion that he must have noticed a recent example of improper serving. Enquiries were made and the truth was soon discovered. A young woman had recently come from Bangalore. During lunch she had asked for more *rasam*, but the servers had ignored her request and had instead poured buttermilk all over her plate.

This was not the first time that a mistake like this had been made. The servers frequently showed little interest in the visitors who ate in the ashram. At times they even seemed to look down on them. Rich people and the people who sat near Bhagavan were served very carefully, but strangers and people who sat a long distance from Bhagavan were often served in a very careless fashion.

Though Bhagavan frequently told the ashram employees to treat his devotees as they treated him, and to serve them as they served him, they rarely paid any attention to what he said. So, in order to teach them how to practise equality, Bhagavan himself would occasionally forego some items of food in order to attract their attention to this aspect of his teachings.

When Bhagavan fell ill, which was something that happened quite often, devotees would suggest various kinds of medicines. Bhagavan would initially reject them all, but if he was pressed he would generally acquiesce, swallow whatever medicine was suggested and continue with the treatment for as long as it was given. Even when the sarcoma appeared on his arm in his last days, he often said that there was no need for medicines or operations because the disease would go away in the same way that it came. However, after registering his protests, he gave in to the demands of his devotees and took whatever medicines were given to him. He also permitted the doctors to operate on him four times.

Bhagavan frequently tried to avoid medication, but he was rarely successful because the devotees felt that they were not

doing their job properly if they allowed his ailments to remain untreated. Sometime in the 1940s Bhagavan fell down and sustained a minor injury. Many people wanted to call a doctor, but Bhagavan initially would not allow it. A woman in the hall started weeping.

'Why are you crying?' he asked.

'Because you will not allow us to call a doctor,' she replied.

Bhagavan sighed and gave up.

'Oh well,' he said, 'call for a doctor if you want to. I have no freedom.'

Because Bhagavan suffered from rheumatic pains in his knees for many years, his attendants used to rub them with oil donated by various devotees. Before getting up from his seat, Bhagavan himself used to massage his knees a little.

If anyone objected to him doing this small job himself, he would say, 'Let me also get some *punya* [merit] by massaging these knees. Is all the *punya* to be earned by you alone?'

When he finally got up, he would support himself with his stick and walk slowly and painfully towards the door. The watching devotees would wince inwardly as they watched each painful step, but Bhagavan would reject even the help of his attendants who wanted him to lean on their arms for support. Even when he fell down, he would insist that no one should help him.

When he suffered from sarcoma in his final days and had several operations, his body became so weak, it was a great effort for him even to get up from his sofa. Those who sat around him and witnessed the extreme pain he was bearing used to feel that same pain in their own bodies. It may have been for this reason that Bhagavan did not cure himself! The unutterable bliss that Bhagavan enjoyed in the high state of realisation clearly benefited the world. Perhaps the excruciating pains that his body suffered were also experienced for the sake of this world. If this is true, it may provide an alternative explanation for Bhagavan's refusal to cure himself.

If one takes the attitude that everything that Bhagavan did was for the benefit of his devotees, this interpretation may not be as far-fetched as it seems at first sight. Bhagavan radiated the fullness of his love all the time. All his acts and statements, even his outbursts of anger, were manifestations of the love he

felt towards us. His actions were all Self-directed. That is, they sprang from some hidden centre that none of us has any access to. Knowing this, we should resist the temptation to judge or interpret him. Instead, we should surrender and leave the rest to him.

Chalam and Souris were regular visitors to Sri Ramanasramam in the late 1930s. Souris now describes one of her most significant visits.

I went to see Bhagavan again in the company of father and Sri Dikshitulu. I entered into a deep trance on all of the four days I was in the ashram. One afternoon I went into *samadhi,* but at that time I did not know that this was what was happening. I only came to know later when I had some similar experiences.

Though I was often in ecstasy in Bhagavan's presence, I could not escape from the difficulties caused by the ashram people. Their traditions, methods of worship and sentiments continually grated on me. I seemed to upset them because my habits were new to them. As I was always very shy in a new place, I always accompanied my father. I even used to sit with him among the men at lunch time.[3]

Every evening *prasad* used to be distributed in the hall. One evening, while I was sitting in a trance, the person distributing *prasad* came up to me and said loudly, 'Take it'. Immediately I stretched out my hand, but he responded by rebuking me. I was startled and immediately opened my eyes. He made gestures, pointing at my hand. Since it was my left hand I decided he was telling me off for stretching it out to receive *prasad.* It was a natural mistake for me to make because by birth I am left-

[3] When I spoke to Souris in the early 1980s she explained the background to some of the problems she experienced at Ramanasramam:

'Though I am a brahmin by birth, our family was completely westernised. At home we ate our meals sitting at a table, using knives and forks. In my childhood, my father had completely rejected traditional India, so much so that I had never sat on the floor and eaten with my fingers until I first went to Ramanasramam. I experienced as much culture shock there as the average foreigner would. Brahmin protocol was an alien world to me at that time. Everyone assumed I knew it, which is why people got angry with me when I ignorantly and innocently transgressed some of the commonly accepted rules.'

handed. Since I did not like being shouted at by the attendants, I began to sit under a tree outside at the time of *prasad.*

'Why are they unnecessarily angry with me?' I thought. 'Why do they behave like this when I have done them no harm?'

Thinking these thoughts made me feel bad, but I soon came to realise that Bhagavan was doing all this to me to eradicate my ego. I did not see meaning in all the rituals. Whenever the priests brought *arati* after a *puja*, Bhagavan would stretch out his hands to the flame and then apply *vibhuti* and *kumkum* to his forehead. I never understood why Bhagavan behaved in this way like an orthodox brahmin. I thought that since he was always in *sahaja samadhi* and was a *jnani* who always saw the whole world as a foolish game, he should not behave like this. There were many other occasions when I saw him behaving in a way that seemed opposite to his teachings as I then understood them. I was confused because I felt that I could not understand him correctly. This confusion was so great that I felt my love for him would diminish. But then I began to correct my attitudes.

'What are we before him?' I thought. 'What knowledge do we have to understand him with? So what if he spoke something and then did something else? If Bhagavan takes *arati* very devoutly, why should I have any objection?' Because of all these thoughts about Bhagavan and *arati*, my meditation used to get disturbed.

Then, one day, I saw Mr. Chadwick take *arati* very devoutly and apply *vibhuti* and *kumkum* to his forehead. It moved me very much. If, for a Hindu by birth like me, there does not appear much meaning or rationale in the *arati*, it should appear even more meaningless to a foreigner such as him. But, I wondered, does he see any inner meaning in it? I felt the answer was 'No'.[4] I felt that he showed such great respect towards the *arati* ceremony merely because Bhagavan himself took it so seriously. From that day on I saw beauty in whatever Bhagavan did.

For me, being in Bhagavan's presence was like being in

[4] Souris was probably wrong in assuming this. Major Chadwick took all aspects of Hindu ritual worship very seriously. He was a major supporter and patron of the ashram's vedic school, teaching English and maths to the brahmin boys who attended. He also attended all the temple ceremonies and was even instrumental in reviving the very elaborate four-hour Sri Chakra *puja* in the 1950s after Bhagavan had passed away.

heaven, but for father Bhagavan's hall was like hell. All the time we were there in the hall Bhagavan appeared real, while the world, my family and my house appeared to be an illusion. I felt very strongly like staying near Bhagavan, but how could I stay on alone? Father could not stay in the ashram except in the holidays.[5]

In those days there were no houses near the ashram. I was used to having many comforts at home, and I had to look after my health very carefully because of my headaches.

I thought, 'How could someone like me live alone in this forest, without anyone's help?'

Father suggested that I ask Bhagavan for advice, but the mere thought shocked me. I regarded Bhagavan as far too great a being to speak to. On no occasion, either then or in the future, did I ever speak to Bhagavan. I never felt the necessity, and an opportunity never arose. Bhagavan solved my doubts about *sadhana* and all my other problems, but not by personal dialogue. They were all cleared up through dreams and visions.

Towards the end of my stay I began writing a letter to a friend. In it I tried to summarise the main events of our visit. I also tried to explain how Bhagavan transformed me spiritually.

> Dear Friend, [6]
> It was 8 o'clock in the evening when we reached Arunachala. Long before we arrived here, we had been gazing at the dark hill that covered the sky. We ate a meal before walking through strange new streets that were permeated with the loud, unfamiliar noises of the Tamil language. We had passed beyond the town, leaving its light far behind, when we were told that the ashram was still two miles away. My poor legs, which had got cramped from sitting continuously in the train and the bus, began to quiver. My heart sank and my eyes became drowsy with sleep. However, with a sportive air of indifference, I started walking the remaining distance. I suddenly lost awareness of what I was doing. When I finally saw the name 'Sri

[5] Chalam worked for the government as an inspector of schools.

[6] The 'friend' was merely a literary device to express her feelings in writing. No such person actually existed.

Ramanasramam' on a signboard, I realised that I had no recollection of walking there. It was as if I had been under some hypnotic spell.

The ashram was still and quiet. As Bhagavan had gone to bed, we were told we could not see him. Fortunately for us, the sweet words of Sri Dikshitulu persuaded the manager to grant us the privilege of a brief visit to Bhagavan on the evening itself. We were asked to slip in silently and have his *darshan*. As we entered the hall, which was lit by a dim electric lamp, we saw Bhagavan in a corner, resting on a white divan. Someone was sitting nearby, rubbing ointment on his legs. For some unknown reason my heart fluttered with tender anxiety and then sank. My father and Sri Dikshitulu prostrated before Bhagavan in salutation. I too saluted him, without even being aware of what I was doing. As soon as I stood up I felt a thrill course through my whole body. It was a kind of physical shock in which blood gushed up to my head. I had never had an experience like this before.

You may laugh and say that all this is my imagination. I would not disagree with you because Bhagavan says that this life of ours, this sorrow and happiness, this love and anger, all the things that we seriously consider to be real, are merely products of our imagination. What is more, he says that the notion 'This is my body' is a mental creation. What do you say to that? Doesn't all this sound very queer to you? Does it surprise you very much that I, who till the other day thought like you and held similar opinions to you, should be so transformed? It is a wonder to me also!

All night I ruminated over the strange experience. Early the next morning, all three of us went to the ashram from the Travellers' Bungalow, took our bath in Pali Tirtham and entered the hall. Even at that early hour, there were many people seated in the hall. Once again we prostrated before Bhagavan and sat in his presence. He was seated on his divan, fanning himself. Were I to describe Bhagavan in the same way I would describe an ordinary man, you would laugh at me.

You would ridicule me saying, ' Is it for this that she went all that way?'

If I am to write how Bhagavan has impressed me, all the vocabulary I can command in the three languages I know would not suffice.

Formerly, I could manage to explain to my father why I loved you. But I should think it would be impossible for me to tell in a way understandable even to your heart, which knows so deeply what love is, in what way I love Bhagavan because the type of love we feel towards him is not within the ambit of our experience. Bhagavan has such love for his devotees, for everyone, for every living being. That love has prompted and got back from me this unique love that I feel for him.

Let me tell you what impression my mind received that morning as soon as I saw him. Do you remember those wax figures of Gandhi we saw in the fair? One spinning the *charka* [spinning wheel] and one reading the newspaper? Bhagavan appeared to me just like one of those wax figures. I could not believe that my eyes were telling me that they saw a human being. And when a word issued forth from his lips – generally he does not speak much at all – it was just as astonishing as it would be if words had come forth from an inanimate idol. Above all else I noticed his sparkling eyes. Can you believe that even in the dark one can see them sparkle? And when he looks at us, his sight, like an arrow, pierces right into the deepest recesses of the heart.

On the night I came, Sri Bhagavan connected a wire from his eternal electricity to my heart. All the time I was in the hall, that current drew me towards him alone with the result that wherever I am, whatever I am doing, my heart is always turned towards him. Perhaps it is an elastic wire that was connected to my heart. Darling, can you imagine how blissfully happy I am?

All thoughts have vanished from my mind. Only once did I attempt to think even of you. I knew that friendship was the most important thing in my life until I met Bhagavan. But in his presence, when I tried to bring you, who were so supremely important to me, into my awareness, the image would not stay. My mind shook

off with a smile the thought of you, feeling that such memories were the mere play of a child. So you can imagine for yourself what happened to all the other things in my mind!

One evening, when Sri Bhagavan returned, the hall was congested with visitors. Leaning on the flower creeper that spreads on the fence outside, father and I sat near the window in front of Bhagavan. Two Gujarati boys were joyfully playing with some children under a nearby almond tree. I am unable to understand why I have come here. But then, I am led to think, what is strange in being alone, when life itself is loneliness? There may be many people around me, but when I really ponder over it, I am always truly alone.

As the *Vedas* were being chanted by the young ashram *brahmacharis*, my breath synchronised itself to the recitation. My vision moved lower, internally, into the heart, as I felt, with undivided attention, that my eyes were gazing at something unknown. My body completely dissolved.

Father and I went into the hall after sunset, squeezing ourselves into the midst of others. At first I was unable to bear the sweltering heat, but later I forgot all about it. My wide-open eyes gazed intently at Sri Bhagavan. All of a sudden, like a huge wave, a surge of emotion swept over my heart. I closed my eyes and fell into a deep trance. The physical frame grew stiff as thrilling shivers passed through my heart. I opened my eyes slowly and saw Bhagavan. He who controls and pulls the strings of destiny was sitting like a statue of the Buddha, looking into space, with his head turned away, as if he were not aware of anything, as if he were in no way concerned with these people who crowded around him.

Gradually my eyes fell on a European gentleman who sat leaning against a wooden shelf. As I was watching him, he opened his eyes and looked queerly at Bhagavan. For some unknown reason I felt great compassion for him. It seems that he came all the way from London to Arunachala after reading Paul Brunton's book. And having come, he stayed on in the strange place all by

himself. He had a big canvas belt around his legs, perhaps because he is not accustomed to sit squatting on the floor. He spoke to no one. He just sat, with his eyes closed, in his corner near the wooden shelf. He has built a cottage for himself within the ashram and his only daily duty is to present himself in the hall. Seeing him, I feel envious. Why should he not take me as his foster child and make room for me in his cottage? I found I had mixed feelings towards him: part of me was scared of him, but the big belt provoked another part of me to smile. When I saw how painfully he squatted on the floor, I was moved to pity him. What strange destiny has brought him all this pain and suffering? The ashram was a strange and lonely place even to me. How must this man have felt amid this alien people who did not even have shirts on their backs? How did it feel for him to live amid shaven and tufted heads, in a foreign country of exotic customs and weird languages?

When the bell rang, all rose for their meal. The heart that had got intoxicated with the sweet bliss of Bhagavan's presence made the body refuse the idea of the food with its characteristic South Indian sauce. The Europeans disappeared, one by one, into the darkness with a clatter of slippers. I decided not to go into the dining room. Instead I sat alone in the dark under an almond tree. As I sat there, the people who walked by, at some distance from me, all seemed to pass like white shadows before my eyes. I looked towards Bhagavan's window and felt a stab of unalloyed pain. Feeling that I had to move, I went towards the ashram gate, sat under a mango tree and looked at the hill. The song 'Arunachala Ramana', sung in the hall by the ashram inmates in the evening, reverberated in my ears. Tears rolled from my eyes. These people have tied down Arunachala Ramana in that hall, but the hill has not given up its beloved of sixteen summers. Unseen by anyone it has hidden him away. I know!

Someone else stood on a rock in the darkness, seemingly as disconsolate as myself. My eyes were filled with tears. Who was that man? Did it matter who he was? Due to the love we both bore to Bhagavan, we

became acquainted with each other. In that love our differences, our forms and qualities, all became one. We knew that both of us were suffering from our love for Bhagavan. What other hardship was required? The bustle in the dining hall was heard like some distant dream. In the darkness the two of us opened our hearts to each other and talked for a while. I did not know who he was. Nor in that darkness did I even see his face.

After the meal the ashramites gave me buttermilk to drink. I drank it, went back to the hall and prostrated again before Bhagavan. Having already done all the mischief, he looked at me innocently, as if he were unaware of having done anything. Does he laugh within himself on seeing my state of madness? But how *could* he? Has he not himself sung, when addressing Lord Arunachala:

Mock me not, my refuge,
Grant me your gracious smile?

Tara wrote a letter to me, asking me, 'Why did you go to Sri Ramana Maharshi? Was it to get your headaches cured, or does he give you some spiritual instructions? Do you go to have a discussion with him? But generally he speaks to no one, isn't that so?'

What am I to write in reply?

I began to think, 'What should I answer if someone questions me on my return, "What have you attained having gone all that way?"'

The answer comes easily: 'Happiness. I have become intoxicated with the grace bestowed by Bhagavan and by the incessant love I feel towards him.'

More than that I do not know what to say to people. But then, if I talk like this, who will understand? Will it be understood even by you who have moved so close to my heart?

So long as I am here, I feel that apart from this place the entire world is non-existent. I feel like staying here permanently. I do not like to go away, leaving Sri Bhagavan. I only want to stay here. How can I leave the

Truth and go back out into that *maya*? But how could I remain here all alone?

When I placed this problem before my father, poor man, he said, 'Ask Bhagavan'.

My immediate reaction was, 'What! Ask Bhagavan! How could I speak to an idol, to a mere "idea"? How could I possibly speak to him at all?'

Throughout the three days I spent here, I was continuously worried by the thought that I could see no possibility of staying permanently at Sri Ramanasramam. I consoled my mind with the belief that if Bhagavan had a desire that I should remain with him, he himself would undoubtedly make all the arrangements.

Beloved friend! Do not really fear that I will stay here alone, and that you will never see me again. Bhagavan will somehow send me back only to you. However much he might have filled me with dispassion and bliss, would the pleasures and fineries, fears and hesitations that have become my friends for the last sixteen years so readily leave my mind?

But do not cherish the hope that Sri Bhagavan will hereafter leave me to myself. He himself has said on one occasion that those who have taken hold of him become like the piece of flesh that has fallen into the jaws of a tiger. Rather, I should say that I am like a rat in a cat's mouth. When I begin to run away, thinking that he has let go of me, he catches me again even more tightly than before and says, 'Where will you go?' One day, while he is pretending to play with me, he will suddenly devour me all at once. But today is not that final day. Until that day dawns, I am still yours!

Do not think my love for you has perished. Let me explain. At night we look for everything by the light of a lamp. We take the lamp with us to illuminate whatever it is that we desire to see, but when the awakening has come in the heart, it is like the sun rising on the world. After this event, why use the lamp? Does not the sun, which shines all over the world, shine more brightly than the lamp on those things that we saw in the night? Similarly, the love previously cherished for others does

not perish merely for the reason that love has expanded. Love will increase all the more when it shines forth not merely on selected individuals but on everyone.

This sudden and precipitate descent into philosophy, all these things that I now write, may appear to you to be absurd. But to me, what I write is alone real. Everything else is absurdity, *maya*. What a transformation has taken place in the space of four days!

Father and the others have had their bath and come. We are about to climb the hill, so I shall write again at noon. Perhaps today we are to go on our return journey.

I am writing at noon from the train. While climbing down the hill, I fancied addressing Sri Bhagavan in the following way:

'I shall come again, Bhagavan. I am incapable of leaving you. Don't get dispirited. Don't be anxious that I might disappear.'

Mark my madness! The anxiety is not for me, but for him!

After going back to the hall, we prostrated before Sri Bhagavan.

'I take leave of you,' said my father.

Without saying a word I absorbed him into my eyes. He looked at me with such a benign smile, all my heart glowed with a great light.

Is he aware of my struggles? Does that smile denote his blessing? Is he saying, 'Come again'? Or is his smile derisive, saying, 'Hereafter, where will you go?' Is it caressing me and telling me, 'Whatever happens, I shall bring you back to me. Don't worry?' Or is it merely an instruction: 'Is there anything like distance for the Self?'

With the physical body resting on the window of the carriage, I see Arunachala receding in the distance. The wheels of the running train sound like the recitation of the *Vedas* I heard the previous evening. The smoke from the engine reminds me of the sweet scent of the incense sticks that burned in the hall. There is a feeling of vacuity, a feeling of having lost something. As I ponder over it I realise that the vacuity stems from the feeling that I have left my 'I' behind. I have somehow remained there because Bhagavan has kept me there. The mind searches,

but it cannot find this 'I'. My body searches for it.

'Where is this vacuity?'

I conclude that it is only a body that is travelling in the train. I am not. What a thief is Bhagavan!

This letter was eventually published in a Telugu magazine. I had already had a short story and a play published, so this was my third published work. Many people appreciated the story and the play, but these same people were disappointed when they read this letter. The general consensus seemed to be: 'Souris, who used to write very well, is now writing trash.'

One day, after I had returned home, I fell into deep *samadhi*. At that time, if there was ever a day when I could not meditate properly, I used to feel very bad. I could feel Bhagavan gradually attracting me towards him. I had stopped doing *sadhana* with the aim of realising the Self. I merely wanted to know Bhagavan and become close to him. I wanted to feel him every minute because during meditation his presence filled my heart with joy.

Father and I went back to the ashram in September of that year. As the train neared Arunachala, the sight of hills and valleys on the mountain thrilled me. This time, with Sri Raja Iyer's help, we got a good bungalow.

Prior to this trip, when I went into *samadhi*, all the things I usually saw with my eyes used to disappear, but if Bhagavan passed by in front of me, I was still able to see his figure. On one of the days of the visit, when I went into *samadhi* in the hall, everything that was in front of me – the people, the walls, Bhagavan's sofa and Bhagavan himself – disappeared. I would not have been afraid if I had also disappeared or obtained liberation, but I experienced fear when Bhagavan himself disappeared because I could not bear the idea that Bhagavan would vanish. After some time, the place where Bhagavan was sitting was occupied by what I can only call a 'presence'. It moved slowly towards me and entered my heart. My vision immediately became concentrated in that spot, and I saw there Bhagavan's face laughing with great joy. I then understood that liberation means the total disappearance of the idea of 'I', and that what remains afterwards is Bhagavan alone.

I returned home and did not see Bhagavan again that year. However, father and Sri Dikshitulu went back to Arunachala in

December. Father wrote to me from Arunachala that Bhagavan had read my letter, which had been published in a magazine called *Bharati*, and had arranged for it to be translated into English and Tamil. All the people in the ashram apparently appreciated it. I was very happy because, when I wrote the letter, I did not even dream that Bhagavan would ever read it.

At about that time, one of my friends, who was grieving over her son's death, went to Bhagavan. Bhagavan, it seems, gave my letter to her and asked her to read it.

He told her, incorrectly, 'I don't understand Telugu properly. Please read it out to me.'

When she got to the phrase 'endless compassion', Bhagavan interrupted her and said, 'My compassion: I probably showed such compassion to her. That child seems to love me very much.'

Bhagavan's little trick worked. After reading the letter my friend's sorrow diminished.

I was told later that when Bhagavan read the letter for the first time, he commented on the last line by exclaiming, 'She said I am a thief! What did I steal?'

In May the following year I went back to Arunachala with father. As we saluted him and sat down, Bhagavan started talking to Mouni Swami about us, but when we moved nearer to him to hear what he was saying, he stopped talking. Throughout the time that we stayed there, Bhagavan played with me in this way.

When I came to salute him, he would pretend not to see me, but when I turned my back he would tell everyone, 'Do you know who she is? It is Souris. She is the one who wrote the letter.'

One evening during my stay I sat on the edge of the well. Bhagavan's sofa had been put a short distance away from me. When Bhagavan came out to sit there, his attendant asked me to get up because I was sitting at a higher level than Bhagavan. As I began to rise, Bhagavan signalled with his hand and said with a smile, 'Sit, sit'.

I sat down again and looked at him. Whenever I looked at him, he looked somewhere else, but other people told me that when I was not looking at him he would look at me. He played hide and seek with me in this way like a mischievous boy. I could not believe that Bhagavan, who was lordly as a lion, as immovable as Arunachala and who was always in *sahaja*

samadhi, was playing with me like a mischievous boy.

For our next visit to Bhagavan, which took place in December that year, Mother embroidered a peacock on a satin pillow cover and sent it to Bhagavan through me.

When I gave it to Bhagavan, he looked at it smilingly and asked, 'What is this?'

I handed it over to him and went away without saying a word.

After that visit I did not go to Bhagavan again for ten years. When I came back from the ashram in 1939, home seemed like jail to me. But whenever I thought strongly of going back to Arunachala, Bhagavan would appear in a dream and counsel me, 'Why do you worry? I am always with you.'

I continued my *sadhana* at home. If Bhagavan had not guided me through my dreams during that long period I would have gone astray many times and would have been deceived by many.

In one of my dreams Bhagavan appeared and asked me, 'Will you choose a writing career or Self-realisation?' I replied in the dream that I would choose Self-realisation. Up till then I had had a plan to live at Arunachala and support myself with money earned from writing. At that stage of my life, writing had become more than a potential source of income. It had become an emotional outlet for me. I used to put some of my ideas, which were not clear even to me, and which I could not describe verbally, down on paper. This practice often produced states of mental peace.

After this dream some people who had read my published stories used to ask me, 'What are you writing nowadays?'

When I answered, 'Bhagavan told me to stop,' they would look at me in disbelief.

In every vacation father and I tried to go to Bhagavan, but some obstacle always prevented us. It seems that Bhagavan did not want me to go there. I consoled myself by thinking, 'When he wants me to come, he will take care of all the arrangements himself'. In this way and other ways I tried to surrender by giving all my troubles and burdens to him. I left it up to him either to keep me at home or to take me to Ramanasramam.

At the end of these ten years, my mother's elder sister, who had been our guardian throughout that period, died. After her death Bhagavan came closer to me. We had to face many difficulties and problems at that time, but her death broke the

last bond we had with this world. 'Where can we go now except to Bhagavan?' we thought.

We packed up all our belongings and started out for Arunachala. It was January 1950 and by that time Bhagavan had already undergone three operations for cancer. He was in the last stage of his life. When we got down with three cartloads of luggage, all the residents of Ramananagar [the settlement that grew up around Sri Ramanasramam] started laughing at us. They thought that it was a strange time for us to take up residence there. But for us, whether Bhagavan was in the body or not, Arunachala was our only refuge.

Chalam comments on the circumstances that prompted the move and the events that followed:

At the end of 1949 my sister-in-law, who had looked after us since our childhood, passed away. Feeling that this was our last link with the world, we decided to give up our home and move to Arunachala. In those days we had no friends, no money, no income. In fact we had no one except Bhagavan. I wondered how we would live at Arunachala without any money or income. At that time I didn't have enough faith to believe that Bhagavan would look after all our needs. We decided to go, despite these misgivings, because we felt that we had no alternative.

We went at the beginning of 1950. Bhagavan was very ill when we saw him, but he still looked at us affectionately as if he had been waiting for our arrival. We rented a house and a hut near the ashram, but within a few weeks of our arrival Bhagavan gave up the body. We had come to die in his presence, but instead he passed away before our very eyes.

After his death virtually all the devotees left and Ramananagar was deserted. In broad daylight thieves started looting the abandoned houses. Only our house and the ashram were left untouched. These activities did not worry us, for we felt both safe and protected. Both at the time of the *mahanirvana* [the physical passing away of Bhagavan] and in the terrifying loneliness that followed it, Bhagavan gave us strength and protected us. Before he left the body Bhagavan had assured us that he would not be going away. We believed in his words and stayed on near his *samadhi*. For us, there was nowhere else to go.

After one year my health deteriorated still more and our

money ran out. We were reaching the end of our resources, materially and spiritually. Even after all my time with Bhagavan, I still had no faith in God, or karma, or life after death, but I did believe that Bhagavan was the only being who could do something to alleviate our plight. I believed that he could, but at the same time I never had any expectation that he would.

In the months that followed her arrival at Arunachala, Souris was on a higher plane. She spent most of her time sitting alone in *samadhi*. On 15th August, 1951, Iswara appeared before her and said that if we followed his instructions he would look after us all and protect us in future. He also said that Bhagavan had sent him and that he and Bhagavan were one. This was the major turning point in our lives. We accepted Iswara's word, accepted that he was Bhagavan who had come in this form to guide us, and surrendered our lives to him. With great success he has been guiding us ever since.

Souris now describes these climactic events in her own words:

As we began to settle down [at Arunachala in 1950], my meditation began to change. Previously, when I had seen Bhagavan's physical form, love would glow in my heart. This phenomenon stopped, but my devotion and love towards him did not decrease. Instead my heart became steadily aware of his real Self rather than his physical body. I understood later why this happened. Bhagavan was intentionally breaking my bond of love towards him in order to make me more aware of his real Self.

I used to wonder many times in early 1950 whether I could stand the shock of Bhagavan dying, but when it eventually happened I was not even present at Arunachala. I was in Madras. The news of his death did not move me at all, and I was surprised at my indifference towards it. I learned later that my neutral reaction was a manifestation of his compassion towards me.

While I was still in Madras I received a letter from my father saying that he felt that the power in Bhagavan's *samadhi* was greater than the power that formerly radiated from his physical form. When I came back to Arunachala, the ashram was deserted, but even so I immediately felt Bhagavan's presence. I wondered why all the devotees had left the ashram simply because Bhagavan was no longer present in his physical form. When I sat near Bhagavan's *samadhi* with my eyes closed, his smiling

face used to appear before me. But no matter how clearly I felt his presence, my eyes invariably searched for his physical form. I soon discovered that my *sadhana* would be greatly helped if I sat near Bhagavan's *samadhi.* In the weeks that followed a great force took control of my *sadhana* and began to guide me. That force decided where I should sit for *sadhana*, how long I should sit and when I should get up. My meditation became very intense, but at the same time my body began to get weaker and weaker. Whenever I meditated, my heart would be gripped by some unusual palpitations, but I was too engrossed in my meditation to care.

One evening, when I was too weak to go to the ashram, a great force possessed my body as I sat for meditation. I felt that someone had grabbed my heart and had physically stopped it. I became breathless. My hands and feet became cold and I began to fear that either death or liberation, one of two things, was about to happen. I was also aware that my pulse was very weak.

I remained in that state for four days. Though I had stopped meditating because of my physical weakness, I found that the meditation went on spontaneously of its own accord. Eventually, after gaining some strength, I went to Bhagavan's *samadhi* and surrendered myself once more.

'You may kill me or give me liberation,' I said. 'It is up to you. I am not afraid. I will not try to run away from my karma.'

From that moment on my fear vanished, and the gripping sensation around my heart also stopped.

My family were giving me tonics and stimulants because they were very anxious about my health. I had a dream around this time in which mother went to Bhagavan and told him how worried she was about my health.

Bhagavan responded by telling her, 'There is nothing to worry about'.

I was so weak, I was not even able to go to the ashram. I very much liked going there, but the force that was grinding me down would not let go.

I used to stand near Bhagavan's photo and ask, 'Will you not send me to the ashram?'

Bhagavan used to look back at me with a smile that seemed to say, 'Am I not here?'

Soon the power that was guiding me took me into a dark room. I stayed there, unable to move throughout the day. My

whole body started to shake and my breath began to come out with a hissing noise. Four or five days were spent like this. There was no meditation going on, so consequently there was no feeling of happiness. I was merely struggling there, breathless. Once, when I thought that I would not be able to stay in that room for another moment, the smiling face of Bhagavan appeared and my heart filled with joy again.

I called to him, 'Bhagavan! How many days do I have to suffer in this dark room?'

He smiled and asked me in return, 'Don't you want sound, good health? Don't you want the *darshan* of Iswara [God]?'

He smiled again and repeated his query: 'Don't you want perfect health? Don't you want Iswara's *darshan*?'

Then he disappeared.

The next afternoon, at exactly the same time that Bhagavan had given me *darshan* the previous day, Iswara appeared to me and said that he and Bhagavan were one and the same, and that whenever we looked at Bhagavan, we were really looking at him.

'Now I am appearing like this,' he went on to say, 'but actually I have no name and no form. From now on my word is going to guide you and all others who believe that I am speaking through you.'

He gave me information about my previous births, and also about the creation of this and other worlds. He talked at length on the inner meanings of spirituality, philosophy and yoga.

I, who was following Bhagavan's philosophy, initially did not accept what Iswara had told me because Bhagavan had always warned against the visions that one comes across in *sadhana*. My mind remained steadily attached to Bhagavan's form and his love. Though Iswara had appeared in a most beautiful form, my mind did not become attracted to him.

He tried to convince me in many ways that he was not a vision that my mind had created. He told me that what he was saying was the truth and that I should not hesitate to accept it. He even said that if I wanted to, I could ask Bhagavan himself. Iswara finally faded away.

Bhagavan then appeared before me and said, 'What my father has said is true. Do what he says.'

After saying this, he disappeared.

From that day on Iswara has been guiding me and everyone in my house. From that day on my own will disappeared and His will has been leading me.

Amongst our close friends, some believed that Iswara was guiding me while others, who were quite close to me, had no faith. Many, who had not even heard about Bhagavan before, now learned about Iswara and Bhagavan, and became ardent devotees. Through Iswara's spoken guidance they received much help and light. Father, who had been an agnostic almost all his life, in spite of his devotion to Bhagavan, accepted my story and began to be guided by Iswara.

When Anandamayi Ma came to Arunachala in the 1950s, I very much wanted to see her.

'All right, you will meet her,' said Iswara. But how could I, since I was not permitted to go to the ashram?

He told me, 'You will meet her spiritually, not physically.'

When she came into our compound one evening, I felt her presence in my heart. I also saw an indistinct female from before me. I was thinking of bowing to her when Bhagavan, with his stick, appeared in her place and sat down opposite me. For some time I was captivated by his image. A little later I became aware that Anandamayi Ma was leaving the compound because I could feel her presence moving away from me. Bhagavan too got up, followed her and then disappeared. This incident taught me that we are all only Bhagavan in different forms. None of us is separate from him. I had his *darshan* in the place of Anandamayi Ma as both were one and the same.

What more can I say? Bhagavan is still guiding us all through his silent speech. This music is just a prelude of greater things to come. Soon it is going to become a universe-filling symphony. And at the centre of that space-devouring harmony is the silent music of Bhagavan. Where is the end for the great cosmic play that Bhagavan is weaving as he stands among us? His *lila* manifests now in the same way that it will for all time to come.

Swami Madhavatirtha

Swami Madhavatirtha (1895–1960) was a prolific writer on a wide variety of spiritual topics. During a long and productive career he lectured widely and wrote more than a hundred books. Some were in English, but the majority were in Gujarati, his native language. He studied Vedanta from 1913–19 but in the five years that followed he found himself increasingly attracted to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo. He had several long philosophical conversations with him during this period, but they failed to satisfy him. In 1926 he made a final break with Sri Aurobindo and continued his spiritual searches elsewhere.

In August 1944 he came to Sri Ramanasramam and stayed for two weeks. It was his first and only visit to the ashram. Although it cannot be said that he became a devotee of Sri Ramana, in his Gujarati book Ramana Maharshi Parichaya Temno Ane Bodha (The Life and Teachings of Ramana Maharshi) *he wrote that this brief visit substantially changed the course of his life. Bhagavan advised him to give up his lecturing and travelling, to remain in one place and to devote his energies to getting established in the Self. Swami Madhavatirtha subsequently set up an ashram near Ahmedabad, curtailed his teaching activities, and spent most of the remainder of his life there.*

In the year 1944 Sri Manu Subedar invited me to accompany him to Sri Ramanasramam. We met in Bombay, as previously arranged, but circumstances did not permit him to carry on with the programme. I therefore decided to proceed by myself to the abode of the sage of Arunachala since I had already read and heard much about him.

I reached the ashram on 14th August. My first *darshan* of Sri Maharshi, which happened to be in the dining hall, was so entirely free from sanctimonious conventions, I was at once put at ease and in perfect tune with the sage's surroundings. The sage's benign look of welcome made me feel at home and conveyed to me a sense of ineffable happiness, a feeling that

remained with me throughout my stay at Sri Ramanasramam. It has always been my habit to note down my impressions during such visits to important places and to make a record of them for the benefit of other aspirants. The notes I took at Sri Ramanasramam formed the basis of my Gujarati book on Sri Ramana Maharshi that was published by Sri Manu Subedar of the Sasthu Sahitya.

I should like to refer in the first instance to a somewhat mystical experience I had during my visit. It is rather difficult to describe such an experience but I shall try to convey some idea about my experience by borrowing an analogy from the *Srimad Bhagavatam*. Sometime before the birth of Sri Krishna, it is said, the Lord entered into the heart of Sri Vasudeva, who then shone like the sun. Later, this light passed into Devaki through a mere look of Vasudeva, after which she shone like the moon. On the very first day of my *darshan* of Sri Maharshi in the dining hall, I found in the look of the sage the dazzling brilliance of the sun. On a subsequent day, while I was sitting in the presence of Sri Maharshi in the hall, I recognized the same brilliance in the look of the sage. It seemed to pierce me to the core of my being, even as the light of the Lord passed into Devaki through the look of Vasudeva. My breath seemed to stop for a while and my mind was elevated into some spiritual realm of unutterable peace and happiness.

Through detachment and discrimination one can aspire to the state of *sakshibhava*, the state of the witnessing self, but there is a higher state in which one realises one's identity with all that exists. In Sanskrit this is known as *abhinnabhava*. Though this state, which was realised by the Maharshi, is beyond the mental comprehension and understanding of the normal aspirant's mind, one can, to a certain extent, understand the nature and significance of *abhinnabhava* by staying, even for a short while, in the benign presence of a great sage such as the Maharshi.

While sitting in the hall I observed the Maharshi resting on his couch wholly unconcerned with what was taking place in his presence (for instance, the constant flow of visitors who prostrated themselves before him and moved on one after the other) and yet I could easily discern in him the attitude of oneness with all, or *abhinnabhava*. I can confidently say that

it was through his *abhinnabhava* that he touched the inner being of visitors, who were then able to feel within themselves the presence of the universal spirit, transcending thought. Having realised that the Maharshi was radiating the power of the Self in this way, I decided to ask him how I could best prepare myself to receive this transmission of grace while sitting in his presence.

Question: While sitting near you, what sort of mental state should we have so as to receive the transmission from your Self?

Maharshi: Keep your mind still. That is enough. You will get spiritual help sitting in this hall if you keep yourself still. The aim of all practices is to give up all practices. When the mind becomes still, the power of the Self will be experienced. The waves of the Self are pervading everywhere. If the mind is in peace, one begins to experience them.

Q: Which is better for me, to gaze at your eyes or your face? Or should I sit with closed eyes and concentrate my mind on a particular thing?

M: Gaze at your own real nature. It is immaterial whether the eyes are open or closed. Everywhere there is only the one, so it is all the same whether you keep your eyes open or closed. If you wish to meditate, do so on the 'I' that is within you. It is *Atman*. Because it has no eyes, there is no need either to open or close the eyes. When you attain Self-knowledge, there will no longer be any ideas about the world. When you are sitting in a room, whether the windows are open or closed, you are the same person, in the same state. In the same way, if you abide in the state of reality, it is all the same whether the eyes are open or closed. It matters little whether external activities go on or not.

The reciprocal relationship between the Maharshi and his *abhinnabhava* and the aspirant sitting in his presence is analogous to that of a radio transmitter and a receiver. If the visitor is really anxious to obtain the fullest benefit of the benign influence radiating from the silent presence of the sage, he, the visitor, must attune his mind, which according to the above analogy will be the receiving set, to the proper wavelength.

The silence of the sage is constant and exercises uninterruptedly its benign influence, whether the sage appears to be outwardly aware of the world or not. Reverting to the analogy of the transmitter, I may say that, so far as the sage is concerned, his spiritual influence is transmitted unceasingly. But from the point of view of the seeker, who is still subject to the veiling power of *maya,* the continued beneficent influence exercised by the sage will have no apparent effect unless he, the seeker, is himself ready to receive it. During my stay the Maharshi himself compared the radiation of his grace to a radio transmitter in a conversation that another devotee had with him.

Q: Some say that to make an effort for one's liberation is selfish, and that instead of that, one should do good to others by selfless service.

M: Those people believe that *jnanis* are selfish and that they themselves are selfless, but this is not a true belief. The *jnani* lives in the experience of *Brahman* and the effect of this experience spreads all over the world. A radio transmission is done from one point but its effect can be felt all over the world. Those who would like to benefit from it can do so. Similarly, the Self-realisation of the *jnani* spreads everywhere and whosoever wants can tune into it. This is not a lesser service.

Having received satisfactory replies to my own queries on how one should comport oneself in order to receive fully the benefits of the Maharshi's emanations of grace, I asked several more questions about my own personal *sadhana*:

Q: In my present state, is there sufficient faith, humility and surrender in me? If not, how to make them complete?

M: You are perfect and complete [*poorna*], so abandon the idea of incompleteness. There is nothing to be destroyed. *Ahankara,* the individual 'I', is not a real thing. It is the mind that makes the effort and the mind is not real. Just as it is not necessary to kill a rope that one imagines to be a snake, so also there is no need to kill the mind. Knowing the form of the mind makes the mind disappear. That which is forever non-existent is already removed.

Q: Should I sit in a particular posture and sit on a grass mat?

M: Stability in the Self is the real posture. Be steady in that posture. In what posture will *Atman* sit? It is wrong to say that there is no Self-knowledge without *asanas* [postures]. *Atman* has no need of them. The compulsion of having a particular kind of posture makes the mind get agitated.

Q: I am doing propaganda work by publishing religious teachings. I do *japa*, mantra, writing, singing the exploits of the Lord, study and instructions. Should I continue with this or not? In other words, while I am conducting the enquiry 'Who am I?' should I continue with all the above work?

M: If you want to do all these works and are able to do so without giving up self-enquiry, you may do so. The work will go on in accordance with your *prarabdha* [allotted destiny]. You must first, though, understand what is the purpose of *japa*, singing and service. Be as you are. Reality is the real *japa*; *japa* and God are one. There is identity between the name and the thing named. The great devotee Namdev has said [at this point the Maharshi picked up an old copy of *The Vision* and began to read from it]:

1 The Name permeates densely the sky and lowest regions and the entire universe. Who can tell to what depths in the nether regions and to what heights in the heavens it extends? The ignorant undergo the eighty-four lakh [8.4 million] species of births, not knowing the essence of things. Namdev says the Name is immortal. Forms are innumerable, but the Name is all that.

2 The Name itself is form and form itself is Name. There is no distinction between Name and form. God became manifest and assumed Name and form. Hence the Name the *Vedas* have established. Beware, there is no mantra beyond the Name. Those who say otherwise are ignorant. Namdev says the Name is Keshava [God] Himself. This is known only to the loving devotees of the Lord.

3 The all-pervading nature of the Name can only be

understood when one recognises one's own 'I'. When one's own name is not recognised, it is impossible to get the all-pervading Name. When one knows oneself, then one finds the Name everywhere. To see the Name as separate from the named creates illusion. Namdev says, 'Ask the saints'.

4 None can realise the Name by practice of knowledge, meditation or austerity. Surrender yourself first at the feet of the Guru and learn to know that 'I' myself is that Name. After finding the source of that 'I', merge your individuality in that oneness, which is self-existent and devoid of all duality. That which pervades beyond *dvaita* [duality] and *dvaitatita* [that which is beyond duality], that Name has come into the three worlds. The Name is *Parabrahman* [the supreme *Brahman*] itself, where there is no action arising out of duality.[1]

The notion that 'I' is the first and ultimate name of God is one that is central to an understanding of the Maharshi's teachings on the nature of God and the means by which one can reach him. During my visit another visitor who asked about *japa* received confirmation of this:

Q: At present I am meditating on the form of an idol, and I am also doing *japa* in accordance with the instruction I have received from my Guru. Am I or am I not fit to conduct the enquiry of 'Who am I?'

M: 'I' is also the Guru mantra. It is said in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* that the first name of God is 'I'. '*Aham nama abhavat*' ['I becomes the name']. *Om* came later.

[1] *The Philosophy of the Divine Name* by Namdev originally appeared in an English translation in a 1937 edition of *The Vision,* the journal of Swami Ramdas' ashram in Kerala. The translation was rather loose so I have taken the liberty of inserting a more accurate one. The original translation can be found in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 439. The version I have used can be found a few pages later (talk no. 448) in the same book.

Atman always performs the *japa* of 'I, I'. Without the performer of the *japa*, nobody knows the *japa*. Everybody constantly does the *japa* of 'I'. By concentrating on that 'I', meditation will improve. The result of such meditation is knowledge. Even so, if you wish to continue meditation on a form, you may do so. The *sadhana* that is suitable for a person is the proper method for him.

After listening to the Maharshi's views on the Name of God, I continued to ask some more personal questions:

Q: What books should I read for *swadhyaya* [personal study]?

M: The Self is the real book. You can glance anywhere in that book; nobody can take it away from you. Whenever you are free, turn towards the Self. Thereafter you may read whatever you like.

Q: How to uproot the weariness, fear and anxiety that arise during meditation?

M: Find out to whom these questions occur. By conducting this enquiry these things will disappear. These things are impermanent. Do not pay attention to them. When there is knowledge of duality, fear arises. Fear only comes when you think that there are others apart from you. If you direct your mind towards the Self, fear and anxiety will go away. In your present state, when the mind is agitated, if you remove one kind of fear, another will rise up and there will be no end of them. It is a laborious task to pluck the leaves off a tree one by one. The 'I' feeling is the root of all thoughts. If you destroy the root, the leaves and branches will wither away. Instead of forming bad habits and taking medicine for them, it is better to see that such bad habits are not formed.

Q: During and after meditation, I get many thoughts about the unhappy people of the world.

M: First find out whether there is an 'I' in you or not. It is this ego 'I' [*ahankara*] that gets these thoughts and, as a result, you feel weakness. Therefore find out how identification with the body takes place. Body consciousness is the cause of all misery. When you conduct the enquiry into the ego 'I', you will find out its source and you will be able to remove it. After

that there will be no more questions of the type you are asking.

After listening to the Maharshi's answers for several days I realised that this was a standard response to people who told him that they were worried about the state of the world. Sri Maharshi, firmly established in the advaitic state, sometimes even refused to concede that there were people and a world that were in need of assistance.

Q: Why don't you do good to others?
M: In my view there are no others. To whom shall I then give *upadesa*?
Q: If *sadhus* mingle with people and reform them, it will be very good.
M: In the eye of the *jnani* there are no others, so there is nothing like mingling with others for him.

At other times the Maharshi would concede, just for the sake of his devotees, that other people did exist and have problems. But he felt no compulsion to go out and do anything about them because, as I have mentioned earlier, he felt that the *jnani* effortlessly transmitted his grace to all parts of the world. It was his view that devotees should strive for Self-realisation, rather than worry themselves about the state of the world, for once they were in that state, their own transmission of *mauna,* which is the grace emitted through silence, would help the world.

Q: What will happen to the world?
M: The world!
Q: In the world, much is going on. What about that?
M: Have you found the reason for your own miseries so that you are now going to find out the reasons for the sufferings of others?
Q: But on such matters you always remain silent!
M: With silence one can affect the whole world.

The Maharshi upheld the vedantic view that the individual 'I' is unreal and that everything that is perceived is also unreal. As a natural corollary to this he would point out to those who

were worried about the state of the world that the world and its problems would disappear simultaneously with the disappearance of the individual 'I'.

The Maharshi told spiritual seekers that if they wanted to experience the state wherein the false 'I' was absent, they should ask themselves 'Who am I?' and attempt to find out what this 'I' was and where it came from. As a result of listening to the Maharshi's replies, I inferred that one should proceed with this investigation in the following way: one should first ask oneself the question and then fix the attention on the place where the question arises from. The thought should be taken there. If this is done, the veiling will be removed and the light of the Self will shine. That is the method of spiritual practice. Simultaneously, in order to remove the obstacles of the not-Self [*anatma*], one should get firmly established in the state of non-attachment [*vairagya*]. It was not necessary for the Maharshi himself to develop this attitude of non-attachment because it was natural to him, but spiritual seekers who are attempting to follow this practice of self-enquiry would be well advised to increase their own attitude of non-attachment.

One man who had been practising self-enquiry by asking himself 'Who am I? Who am I?' failed to make any progress. On the contrary, he started to experience fear in the mind.

When he told the Maharshi that he had failed to get any kind of beneficial experience from following the practice, the Maharshi replied, 'To get the experience one should not rely on *buddhi* [the discriminating intellect] alone, one should combine it with a firm conviction [*bhavana*]. 'I am': one who has that thought is also 'I', pure consciousness. With such a feeling one should go deep within and take hold of the experience.'

During my stay I recorded several exchanges between the Maharshi and visitors on the subject of self-enquiry. Let us therefore listen to the Maharshi himself as he explains how the practice of self-enquiry should be done:

Q: Who am I? To whom does the question refer?

M: The question refers to the individual 'I'. It does not refer to the *Atman.*

Q: Should I say 'I am Siva' along with the enquiry 'Who am

I?' Should I not say, 'I am not the mind, intellect, body, etc.'?

M: You should not give answers to the mind in the course of your enquiry. The reply should be allowed to come from within. The reply of the individual 'I' is not real. Continue to enquire until you get the answer by the method of *jnana marga* [the path of knowledge]. This enquiry is called meditation. The inactive, peaceful, full-of-knowledge experience that arises from this state is *jnana.*

Q: Who am I? From where [am I]? Should one constantly do *japa* of this with the mind or should one put the question once or twice before the mind, then go deeply into the root of 'I' and there stop all thoughts of the world?

M: One should not do *japa*: 'Who am I? Who am I?' Having put the question once before the mind, one should search for the root of the 'I' and stop other thoughts. If a person's name is Desai, it is not necessary for him to repeat 'I am Desai, I am Desai'. Similarly, the repetition of the phrases such as 'I am *Brahman,* I am *Brahman*' is not necessary. In all *sadhanas* the mind has to be kept quiet, but while doing *japa* the mind will not be quiet. Instead of practising like this, the seer of the mind, meaning the witness, should be experienced as the form of *Brahman* and *Brahman* should be experienced as the witness.

Q: According to your teachings, when one undertakes the search for the 'I' does one get the experience of being the witness?

M: Yes.

Q: After that, if one obliterates what is seen, the witness becomes the form of *Brahman.*

M: That is correct.

Q: Should *pranayama* [yogic breath control] be practised regularly or not? And along with it, should one ask the question 'Who am I?' And during the asking of the question should one or should one not keep one's attention on the incoming and outgoing of the breath?

M: It is not absolutely necessary to do *pranayama.* If one can attempt to do the enquiry 'Who am I?' without keeping one's attention on the breath, then that is much better. *Pranayama* is there for those who cannot concentrate the mind in any other way. When the strength of the mind increases, *pranayama* will not be necessary. The chief function of *pranayama* is to provide

the reins to keep under control the horse-like mind.

Q: What is your opinion about *siddhis* [supernatural powers]?

M: Self-realisation is the greatest *siddhi.*

Q: When I think 'Who am I?' I do not get any answer from within.

M: That belief is wrong. If you search properly, you will find out that the 'I' that is trying to find out will, later on, cease to exist. As you give up the thoughts of name and form, you will go deeper and deeper inside.

Q: If I were to remove all thoughts, then, would I be able to meditate properly?

M: In the beginning that is all right. But when your attraction towards the Self increases, the real self-enquiry will start. At that time all your efforts will stop and a new state will come into being.

Q: Can the *sadhana* of self-enquiry be carried on while remaining in the house, or does one have to leave home?

M: Are you in the house or is the house in you? Be where you are.

Q: Then I can remain in the house.

M: It does not mean that. What I mean is that you should abide in your real nature. You are not the house, but the house as well as the world are in you. The householder who believes that he is not a householder, in spite of his staying in his house, is the one who has renounced. Visualise a man sleeping in a train. If the train moves or stops, or if the engine is changed, it is all the same to him. Similarly, one who is properly established in the *Atman* knows that nothing happens in this world, and that nothing is ever destroyed. Something is felt to be happening only when we are in the state of *pramata,* the knower. This state is not one's real nature. For the *jnani* who has given up the idea of the knower, nothing ever happens.

I shall come back to this idea – that for the *jnani* nothing ever happens – later, for it is a puzzling concept that needs more elaboration. But first, though, I shall continue with the topic of householders and their *sadhana.*

Q: Can a householder get liberation or not?

M: Why have you taken it for granted that you are a householder? If you were to take *sannyasa*, a similar thought, 'I am a *sannyasin*', will be with you. Wherever you go, your mind is sure to be with you. The root of all thoughts is the individual 'I', and through it the world is known. You believe that you are a householder on account of that same 'I'. So, the mind has to be corrected. If the mind can be corrected in the jungle, then why should it not be corrected in the house? Once the mind is corrected, the circumstances will also be corrected. While performing activities or in giving up activities, the feeling of 'I' should not intrude.

Desire itself is bondage. If in your destiny there are activities, then you will have activities to do, but they should be done without *ahankara*. And if there is inactivity in your *prarabdha* [destiny], then that too should be accepted without *ahankara*.

Q: For such knowledge, is a Guru necessary?

M: If any knowledge is to be attained, a Guru is necessary. But on this path we have to forget what we have learned. When camphor burns, nothing remains afterwards. The mind should be made like camphor. In the search for the Self, the mind should burn out. Then there will be nothing remaining such as inside or outside.

Q: Are the four *asramas* [stages of life][2] necessary or not?

M: The first three *asramas* are necessary for everyday life, but in them one should live in such a way that life is not antagonistic towards Self-knowledge.

Q: Then what do you say about *sannyasa* [the fourth *asrama*]?

M: *Sannyasa* does not mean merely taking a stick and a water pot, and then going out begging. It is said that in the householder stage [the second *asrama*] one should serve, in

[2] The four *asramas* are:

Brahmacharya: a period of celibate study prior to marriage.

Grihastha: married life in which one fulfils one's family and work responsibilities.

Vanaprastha: when one's family commitments are over, which usually means when one's children have been married off, one retires to a solitary place to devote most of one's time to meditation.

Sannyasa: in this final stage one renounces the world, including one's family, and one lives as a wandering mendicant monk.

vanaprastha [the third *asrama*] do *tapas,* and as a result of this *tapas, sannyasa* comes. *Sannyasa* should be understood as an inner condition. The outer attire is not important.

One day, during the second week of my stay, I was standing near the northern gate that leads to the hill path. With me was a devotee who had returned the previous day from Sri Aurobindo's ashram. It was evening and Sri Maharshi came by that way after his usual evening stroll. I wanted to ask him about his views on the theory of creation and the presence of the devotee who had returned from Sri Aurobindo's ashram prompted me to refer to Sri Aurobindo's views on the subject. I may say here that I am well acquainted with Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, for during my earlier visits to him some twenty-five years ago I used to discuss with him freely about these spiritual subjects. By way of an introduction, I asked the Maharshi whether he upheld the vedantic views on creation that were promulgated by Adi-Sankaracharya. After that we moved on to a discussion about Sri Aurobindo's world view.

Q: In the Vedanta of Sri Sankaracharya, the principle of the creation of the world has been accepted for the sake of beginners, but for the advanced, the principle of non-creation is put forward. What is your view in this matter?

M: *Na nirodho na chotpattir*
Nabaddho na cha sadhakaha
Na mumukshur na vai mukta
Ityesha paramarthata

This verse appears in the second chapter [v. 32, *vaithathya prakarana*] of Gaudapada's *Karika* [a commentary on the *Mandukyopanishad*]. It means really that there is no creation and no dissolution. There is no bondage, no one doing spiritual practices, no one seeking spiritual liberation, and no one who is liberated. One who is established in the Self sees this by his knowledge of reality.

Q: Sri Aurobindo believes that the human body is not the last on this earth. Establishment in the Self, according to him, is not perfectly attained in a human body, for Self-knowledge does not operate there in its natural way. Therefore the

vijnanamaya sarira [the body made of pure knowledge][3] in which Self-knowledge can work naturally must be brought down on this earth.

M: Self-knowledge can shine very well in the human body, so there is no need of any other body.

Q: Sri Aurobindo believes that the *vijnanamaya sarira* will not be attacked by disease, will not grow old, and will not die without one's desire.

M: The body itself is a disease. To wish for a long stay of that disease is not the aim of the *jnani.* Anyhow, one has to give up identification with the body. Just as the I-am-the-body consciousness prevents one from attaining Self-knowledge, in the same way, one who has got the conviction that he is not the body will become liberated even if he doesn't desire it.

Q: Sri Aurobindo wants to bring the power of God into the human body.

M: If, after surrendering, one still has this desire, then surrender has not been successful. If one has the attitude, 'If the higher power is to come down, it must come into my body', this will only increase identification with the body. Truly speaking, there is no need of any such descent. After the destruction of the I-am-the-body idea, the individual becomes the form of the absolute. In that state, there is no above or below, front or back.

Q: If the individual becomes the form of the absolute, then who will enjoy the bliss of the absolute? To enjoy the bliss of the absolute, we must be slightly separate from it, like the fly that tastes sugar from a little distance.

M: The bliss of the absolute is the bliss of one's own nature. It is not born, nor has it been created. Pleasure that is created is sure to be destroyed. Sugar, being insentient, cannot taste itself. The fly has to keep a little distance to taste it. But the absolute is awareness and consciousness. It can give its own bliss, but its nature cannot be understood without attaining that state.

[3] This is probably Swami Madhavatirtha's Sanskrit rendering of Supermind, a key term of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. Sri Aurobindo taught that one could evolve physically as well as spiritually. As the subsequent dialogue reveals, Sri Aurobindo maintained that when one evolved into this state, physical immortality was attained.

Q: Sri Aurobindo wants to bring down to earth a new divine race.

M: Whatever is to be attained in the future is to be understood as impermanent. Learn to understand properly what you have now so that there will be no need of thinking about the future.

Q: Sri Aurobindo says that God has created various kinds of worlds and is still going to create a new world.

M: Our present world itself is not real. Each one sees a different imaginary world according to his imagination, so where is the guarantee that the new world will be real? The *jiva* [the individual person], the world and God, all of these are relative ideas. So long as there is the individual sense of 'I', these three are also there.

From this individual sense of 'I', from the mind, these three have arisen. If you stop the mind, the three will not remain, but *Brahman* alone will remain, as it remains and abides even now. We see things because of an error. This misperception will be rectified by enquiring into the real nature of this *jiva*. Even if the *jiva* enters Supermind, it will remain in the mind, but after surrendering the mind, there will be nothing left but *Brahman*. Whether this world is real or unreal, consciousness or inert, a place of happiness or a place of misery, all these states arise in the state of ignorance. They are not useful after realisation.

The state of *Atmanishta* [being fixed in the Self], devoid of the individual feeling of 'I', is the supreme state. In this state there is no room for thinking of objects, nor for this feeling of individual being. There is no doubt of any kind in this natural state of being-consciousness-bliss.

So long as there is the perception of name and form in oneself, God will appear with form, but when the vision of the formless reality is achieved there will be no modifications of seer, seeing and seen. That vision is the nature of consciousness itself, non-dual and undivided. It is limitless, infinite and perfect.

When the individual sense of 'I' arises in the body, the world is seen. If this sense is absent, who then will see the world?

As a result of this discussion I concluded that Sri Maharshi attached no importance to any of the theories of creation or

evolution. In my conversations with him he invariably emphasised the oneness and unchangeability of the Self or *Brahman*, which is the one and only reality, towards which there can be no progress, and in which there is no duality and no differences.

On another day I referred to some other aspects of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, such as the theory of *bheda-abheda* [differences in oneness]. Sri Maharshi remarked that if there is the least difference there must also be the individual sense of 'I', and if difference is conceded, unity would be merely a theoretical proposition. He told me that it is accepted by all that in the absolute there can be no individual 'I'. He further explained that the transition from the ego, the *ahankara,* to the egoless state, if it can at all be called a transition, is not through a change or evolution from the lower to the higher nature in man. It is through the total denial or destruction of the ego. It is like a man waking up from a dream. This transition from the dreaming state to the waking cannot be called an evolution from a lower to a higher state; it is the total negation of the one state in the other. My conversation with the Maharshi on this subject continued in the following way:

Q: What appears separate from us is called the world. When it does not appear separately it is called *Brahman.*

M: It is so.

Q: In spite of that, in Sri Aurobindo Ashram they believe in *swagata-bheda* [differentiation in the Self]. That is, just as there are leaves, flowers, fruits, etc. on one tree, the world also abides in *Brahman* as *swagata-bheda* [different selves]. However, we do not find the original seed after a tree has grown from it. Similarly also, according to this theory, we cannot reach or find God after the creation of the world.

M: The world is not created from *Brahman* in the same way that a tree grows from a seed. The power of the seed is seen in the gross form of the tree but the real form and nature of the seed remain the same.

Q: Even so, there will be Self-differentiation [*swagata-bheda*].

M: Really, there will be no Self-differentiation. All objects are in the one who sees. In a dream, just as all objects are in

the one who sees, so also in the waking the state, all the objects are also in him. When the one who sees is corrected, there will be nothing seen. In dreamless sleep there is no Self-differentiation. If it is real, it must be felt in dreamless sleep also.

Q: Sri Aurobindo believes that multiplicity is not wrong. He believes that there can be oneness with multiplicity and multiplicity with oneness. Both can stay together.

M: Wherever the slightest feeling of difference remains, the feeling of 'I' will remain and surrender will not be complete.

This exchange prompted some of us to ask Sri Maharshi for his views on Sri Aurobindo's teachings on surrender and several other topics:

Q: In the opinion of Sri Aurobindo, surrender is the main *sadhana*.

M: That surrender is also accepted here. But when surrender is complete, there will be no distinction. Often, if some disciple goes to a Guru with money and presents and takes initiation from him and then believes that he has surrendered, his surrender is not real. In surrender, one has to give up one's mind, and after the mind is given away, there will be no duality of any kind. He who remains separate from God has not surrendered.

Q: If all actions and their results are surrendered to God, will the mind be controlled or not?

M: By doing so the mind will be purified, but it will not die. Suppose a drunkard thinks that he has surrendered his karma and its fruits to God, and in his drunken state he commits a mistake and gets beaten with a stick. He must surrender this beating also to God and be indifferent to it. But no one acts like that. One's state changes at the time one gets the beating. Thus, by surrender of this kind, the mind is not completely destroyed. For one who practises surrender, it is a very difficult work to remain in that [surrendered] state.

Q: In the ashram of Sri Aurobindo it is believed that if we surrender to the Guru or God, the authority of the individual goes away. In exchange we get the support of a bigger authority and a divine power shines in us.

M: To expect to receive a bigger divine power after surrendering is not the true attitude of surrender.

Q: Sri Aurobindo believes that just as we can subdue the material nature residing in our body, the sage, in the same way, must have such power in himself that he can change other's material nature, because the Self is common to all.

M: The *jnani* does not believe that there are others, so there is no question of changing anyone's material nature. When others are seen, that is ignorance.

Q: Though Janaka was a *jnani*, he was a ruling monarch, but his Guru, Yajnavalkya, who was also a *jnani*, renounced the world and went to the forest. Why was this so?

M: All happens according to the destiny of each *jnani*. Krishna was an enjoyer of pleasures whereas Sukdev was an ascetic. Janaka and Rama were kings while Vasishta was a believer in activities. All of them were *jnanis*. Their inner experience was the same while their external lives were in accordance with their respective destinies.

Q: Sri Aurobindo says, 'Why should consciousness be restricted to *nirguna* [the unmanifest, or without attributes] only? It can be said to be unlimited only if it can become *saguna* [manifest, with attributes] also.'

M: To escape from all limits is said to be the real *nirguna* state.

Q: Sri Aurobindo believes that in *sat* [being], *chit* [consciousness] and *ananda* [bliss], the *chit* aspect has not only *jnana* but also *sakti* [power]. And where necessary this *chit sakti* can be utilised.[4]

[4] The answer about *chit sakti* appears in *Vedanta Ane Yoga,* p. 342. In *Ramana Maharshi Parichaya Temno Ane Bodha* the same answer does not appear in quotation marks and appears there to be an explanation given by Swami Madhavatirtha. I have decided to attribute it to Bhagavan for two reasons:

(a) the answer contains statements that Bhagavan typically espoused and

(b) Swami Madhavatirtha on other occasions converted Bhagavan's answers into explanations of his own. Some of the statements, for example in *The Golden Jubilee Souvenir,* that appear to be comments by Swami Madhavatirtha, reappear in *Ramana Maharshi Temno Parichaya Ane Bodha* as quotations by Bhagavan.

M: Yes, that is true. Whenever something has to be controlled, some obstacle removed or some change is necessary, the use of *sakti* is required. But in the supreme experience of *Atman*, meaning *stitha prajna* [the state of being established in wisdom], or the state that is beyond the *gunas,* the only experience is that of non-duality. In that state there is no other principle that remains arrayed against it. For a *jnani* established in the Self there is nothing that remains in opposition to him. It is not therefore necessary [for him] to conquer any external things because in that state there is no remnant of anything that is separate. When the Self becomes all pervasive, the physical world is totally absent. Therefore, in spite of the *sakti* being in the *Atman,* it does not become necessary to use it. If one is in a state in which opposition is felt, then to work on that opposition, *Atma sakti* is required.

[Editor's note: It was extremely unusual for Bhagavan to criticise the teachings of another Guru as directly and as strongly as he did in these answers. Normally, when he was asked about contradictions between his own and Sri Aurobindo's teachings, he would avoid controversy by saying that both he and Sri Aurobindo taught that one must surrender, and that questions of doctrinal differences could be raised, if it were still possible, after complete surrender had been accomplished. The following answers are typical of his usual response to such questions:

Q: *What is your opinion of Aurobindo's yoga and his claim to have probed beyond the experiences of the vedic* rishis*?*

M: *Aurobindo advises complete surrender. Let us do that first and await results, and discuss further, if need be, afterwards and not now. There is no use discussing transcendental experiences by those whose limitations are not divested....*

Q: *What about Aurobindo's claim to start from Self-realisation and develop further?*

M: *Let us first realise and then see.*[5]

Q: *What about the 'over-mind', the 'super-mind', the 'Psychic', and the 'Divine' of Sri Aurobindo's terminology?*

[5] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 201.

M: *Realise the Self or the Divine. All these differences will disappear.*[6]

Though there are recorded instances of Bhagavan refuting specific points of Sri Aurobindo's teachings,[7] *he generally refused to expound on the very real differences that existed between his teachings and those of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.*

Sri Aurobindo himself usually took a respectful and conciliatory line when he was asked about Bhagavan's experiences and teachings:

Disciple: *Ramana Maharshi does not believe in the descent [of the Supermind].*

Sri Aurobindo: *In Maharshi's case he has received the thing in the heart and has worked with it, so he does not feel the descent.*[8]

Though Sri Aurobindo, when asked about differences between himself and Bhagavan, would sometimes offer replies such as 'The Maharshi is right and everybody else is also right,' he would not accept that Bhagavan was speaking from a position of full Self-realisation.[9] *His respect for Bhagavan was clearly tempered and qualified by this conviction.*

Question: *People say that there are many similitudes* [sic] *between our yoga and Ramana Maharshi's. Are they right? I would also like to know if there is really something great in him.*

Sri Aurobindo: *Of course there is. But I know nothing about the similitudes. So far as I know he does not believe in the ascent and the descent.*

Q: *He dissuaded all his disciples from visions and voices and said that such things have nothing to do with true realisation of the Self or with one's own goal. What is your opinion?*

SA: *Maharshi is very much of a Vedantist. He does not believe in what we believe or in the descent, etc. At the same time he*

[6] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 504.

[7] See, for example, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 159.

[8] *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 1982 ed., p. 544.

[9] *Ibid*, p. 572.

himself had experiences in which the Mother interfered in a visible free material form and prevented him from doing what he intended to do.[10]

He discouraged his disciples because his aim was the realisation of the inner Self and intuition – in other words the fullness of the spiritual Mind. Visions and voices belong to the inner occult sense. Therefore he did not want them to lay stress on [them]. I also discourage some from having any dealings with visions and voices because I see that they are being misled or are in danger of being misled by false visions and false voices. That does not mean that visions and voices have no value.

Q: *You have called Maharshi a great man and once you said that he lives always in the light. So he must be in the Truth-Consciousness. How then could he be mistaken in discouraging his disciples' occult faculties even when they were not misusing them but were making spiritual progress through them.*

SA: *Because he is a great man, does it follow that everything he thinks or says is right? Or because he lives in the light, does it follow that his light is absolute and complete? The 'Truth-Consciousness' is a phrase I use for the Supermind. He may be, and is, in a true consciousness, but that is a different matter.*

Q: *If he lives in the true consciousness, has he not always the full knowledge? Is he not using intuitive mind?*

SA: *Living in the true consciousness is living in a consciousness in which one is spiritually in union with the divine in one way or*

[10] Bhagavan often spoke of an incident that occurred when he was walking at the foot of Arunachala. A woman appeared and scolded him for wandering around in the hot sun when he should, instead, be sitting quietly. Though Bhagavan accepted that it was good advice, he did not, in any of his retellings, indicate that the woman was a manifestation of the Divine Mother. A note on p. 255 of *Guidance from Sri Aurobindo, Vol. 1*, indicates that this is the story that is being alluded to.

When Sri Aurobindo told this story (see, for example, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 1982 ed., pp. 558–9) he usually said that Bhagavan was running away from his disciples and his ashram, and that the Divine Mother persuaded him to go home and resume his teaching at Sri Ramanasramam. I cannot find any evidence for this in any of the versions of the story that Bhagavan himself told. Bhagavan did occasionally say that Parvati had once manifested to him while he was walking on Arunachala, and that she had offered him some food to eat, but this manifestation did not give him any advice or instructions.

another. But it does not follow that [by] so living one will have complete, exact and infallible truth about all ideas, all things and all persons. Maharshi realises the Divine in a certain aspect and he has the knowledge of what is necessary for his path. It does not follow that he will have other knowledge that [is] beyond what he has reached or is outside it.

Intuition proper is true in itself (when not interpreted or altered by mind) although fragmentary – intuitive mind is mixed with mind and therefore not infallible, because the truth intuition gives may be mixed or imperfectly formed by mind.

***Q:** Is not the inner Self everywhere? Why do we speak of descent and manifestation?*

***SA:** Perhaps you are of the opinion of Ramana Maharshi, 'The Divine is here, how can he descend from anywhere?'*[11]

Swami Madhavatirtha continues with his account.]

On one of the days of my visit somebody gave to the Maharshi the English book *Supreme Mystery,* by Mirra, the mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Sri Maharshi opened it and read from a page of it on which was written, 'Till now in this world every man has made an effort to attain his own liberation only. Our yoga is of such a type by which others also can be given *moksha* [liberation].'

The Maharshi made no comment, but after listening to this extract somebody made a remark that in the path of yoga and *Sankhya* [one of the six systems of Hindu philosophy] thought is only given to the experience of the waking state. Because of this attitude, he said, many separate people are seen in the waking state, and so thoughts of doing good to others arise. Vedanta, on the other hand, takes into consideration and gives thought to all the three states.

'When this perspective is taken,' concluded the man, 'multiplicity does not remain.'

Sri Maharshi commented on this, saying, 'During the waking state, if the one who sees the many is subtracted, that is, if the feeling of "I" is removed, the many will not remain. If the state

[11] *Guidance from Sri Aurobindo Vol I,* 'Letters to a young disciple', pp. 252–5, pub. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1974.

of being the observer is given up, nothing can then be proved. So, the true standpoint is that of the *adhistana* [substratum]. There is nothing except the substratum. To keep the knowledge of that which is not real is useless.'

Sri Maharshi frequently used this term *adhistana* during my visit. On more than one occasion he compared it to the *sruti* note, the continuous monotone that underlies many compositions in Indian music:

Q: How to maintain the thought that all is *Brahman* in the midst of worldly activities?

M: When the harmonium is being played there is a constant note that is called the *sruti*. Along with that, other notes also come out. If the ear is fixed on this note that is constant, then, while listening to the other notes, that original note cannot be forgotten. Actually, that first note gives strength to all the other notes. So, the principle to understand is that the first note is the *adhistana* [substratum] while the other notes represent worldly activities. During worldly activities, if [awareness of] the note of the *adhistana* is continuous, whatever is spoken is then done with the authority of this *adhistana* note. But an ordinary man does not keep his attention on the first note, the *adhistana*. He merely listens to the subsequent notes. The *jnani* keeps his attention on the first note. Sukdev [a sage of ancient India] used to keep such attention and maintain his awareness of *Brahman*. When the attention is fixed properly on the first note, the effect of the other notes will not be felt.

I noticed during my visit that the Maharshi often gave practical demonstrations to drive home a point that he had been making. On a subsequent day, when the conversation I have just recorded was still fresh in our minds, some women started to perform a *bhajan* accompanied by a harmonium.

As soon as the first note came out the Maharshi said: 'Remember that. On the basis of this first note all the other notes will come out and stay. It should be understood that the same thing happens in the case of *adhistana*.'

The *sruti*-note analogy is not an exact one for, as the Maharshi often pointed out, the Self or *adhistana* alone exists. The world and all the people in it have no real independent

existence, so it is not quite correct to compare them to the melodic line that emerges simultaneously with the *sruti*, which would still continue even if the *sruti* note suddenly ceased. This was brought home to me in a wide-ranging discussion I had with the Maharshi on the undifferentiated Self and the nature of knowledge and ignorance.

Q: Some see a serpent in the rope, some a stick, some a garland, and some a flow of water, but the one who sees the rope as a rope has the true knowledge. The knowledge of the other witnesses is not true.

M: It is not necessary to think of the view of other witnesses. Those others are only in your imagination. Know the one who sees and all will be well.

Q: How?

M: In a dream many are seen, but they are all in the imagination of the one who sees. When you wake up from the dream, the dream and those in the dream will take care of their own *prarabdha.*

Q: Then there will be no others?

M: It is the same in the waking state. In *Aparokshanubhuti* [an advaitic work attributed to Sankara], the author says, 'The sight should be fixed in that state in which there is no existence of seer, seeing and seen, and not on the tip of the nose'.

Q: A question arises from this: how can daily life go on if the sight is fixed in this way?

M: *Jnanis* fix their sight in the substratum, the *adhistana,* even during worldly activities because nothing else is real except *adhistana.* To feel that there is clay in the pot is the proper attitude [that is, see the essence and not the form].

Q: A pot can be filled with water, but one cannot achieve the same result by pouring water on clay.

M: I do not tell you to see clay after breaking the pot. Even when the pot is whole you can see it as the form of clay. In the same way the world can be seen as the form of *Brahman.* To have the knowledge of *Brahman* in the waking state is similar to having the knowledge of clay in the pot.

Q: Are names and forms real?

M: You won't find them separate from *adhistana.* When you try to get at name and form, you will find reality only. Therefore

attain the knowledge of that which is real in all three states [waking, dreaming and sleeping].

Q: Is it a fact that dreams arise because of impressions received during the waking state?

M: No, it is not true. In your dream you see many new things and many people whom you have never seen before in your waking state. You may even see a second dream within the dream. After waking up from the second dream, you may feel that you have woken up, but that is the waking state of the first dream. In the same way, man wakes up daily, but it is not to a real waking state.

Q: Why do we see the world as something real?

M: We see so much on a cinema screen, but it is not real. Nothing is real there except the screen. In the same way, in the waking state, there is nothing but the *adhistana.* Knowledge of the waking state is knowledge of the knower of the waking state. Both go away in sleep.

Q: Why do we see such permanency and constancy in the waking state?

M: It is seen on account of wrong ideas. When someone says that he took a bath in the same river twice, he is wrong because when he bathed for the second time, the river was not the same as it was when he bathed for the first time. Somebody may say that he is seeing the same fruit every day, but really, a lot of changes are taking place in the fruit. On seeing the brightness of a flame, a man says that he sees the same flame, but the flame is changing every second. As the oil gets less and less, the flame keeps on changing. The waking state is also like this. The stationary appearance is an error of perception.

Q: Whose is the error?

M: *Pramata* [the knower].

Q: From where did the knower come?

M: On account of the error of perception. In fact, the knower and his false knowledge appear simultaneously, and when the knowledge of the Self is obtained, they disappear simultaneously.

Q: From where did the knower and his ignorance come?

M: Who is asking this question?

Q: I.

M: Find out that 'I' and all your doubts will be solved. Just as in a dream, a false knower, knowledge and known rise up, in the waking state the same process operates. In both states, on knowing this 'I' you know everything, and nothing remains to be known. If, in the waking state, there is enquiry into the 'I', everything can be understood and nothing else will remain to be known.

In deep sleep knower, knowledge and known are absent. At the time of experiencing the true 'I' they will also not exist. Whatever you see happening in the waking state happens only to the knower, and since the knower is unreal, nothing in fact ever happens.

Q: After waking from sleep, why does the world of the previous day appear the same?

M: The world seen on the previous day was not real. It was the knowledge of an unreal knower. In the same way, the world of the next day is also the knowledge of an unreal knower. For the *ajnani* the world is experienced at these times [yesterday and today]. But for the *jnani* the world is not there at any time, past, present or future. What appears separate from us is called by us 'the world'. It appears separate from us due to ego-consciousness [*ahankara*]. When *ahankara* goes there is nothing separate; there is no world. Time also arises from *pramata*, the knower. Because *pramata* is not real, time is also not real. Professor Einstein has also stated this in his theory of relativity.

Q: How then do the affairs of daily life go on?

M: At present the Viceroy has changed the time by putting it an hour in advance. Though the new time is false, daily life still continues.

Q: In *Panchadasi* there is an example that if you wish to hear the music of your son who is singing along with the other boys attending the same school, you have to ask the other boys to be quiet. In the same way, to hear the voice of Self, you have to stop all other activities.

M: In this particular example, even if your son is not present you will hear the music of the other boys. So since this is a different situation, the analogy does not fit well. According to another example, if we fix our attention on the main tune of the harmonium, there will be no difficulty in listening to that

tune, even if many other tunes are going on along with it.

Q: Just as a mirage, though believed to be unreal, appears again, similarly, though the world is believed to be unreal, it reappears.

M: Just as the knowledge of the water in the mirage is not true, similarly, the knowledge of the world in *Brahman* is not true. All is one *Brahma-rupa* [form of *Brahman*]. That alone is true knowledge.

Q: According to the old system of Vedanta, it seems that ignorance arises first, and then arises the idea of individual existence, but according to the new system there seems to be no before or after. The idea of individual existence, ignorance and the world arise simultaneously, and on attaining knowledge, all of these three disappear.

M: It is true. See the world as consisting of *Brahman* after making your vision *jnanamaya* [full of knowledge].

Q: Such a state can only be obtained by *satsang* [association with holy men].

M: Do not think that *satsang* means only talks and conversations. It means abidance in being as the form of the Self.

Q: What is the meaning of '*Atman* is *swayam prakasa*' [The Self shines by its own light]?

M: Just as the sun has never seen darkness, similarly, the Self has never seen ignorance. The Self is unknowable, but it can be experienced by *aparoksha anubhava* [knowledge of the Self by direct perception]. This is called *swaprakasatwa* [Self-illumination].

The subjects of knowledge and ignorance, and of the knower, knowing and the known, are naturally connected to ideas about the reality of the world. Before I give some of the Maharshi's views on this subject, I should mention that it is a subject I had long been interested in myself, so much so that I had, prior to my visit, authored a small book entitled *Maya* in which I had attempted to relate certain Indian ideas on the reality of the world to those propounded by Einstein in his theories of relativity. I had sent the Maharshi a copy prior to my visit and was very curious to know what he had thought of my basic thesis.

Q: Professor Einstein has recently proved by the method of mathematics that space, time, objects, form, weight and speed, etc. are all relative to the sight of the seer. A small booklet called *Maya* was sent to you on this subject.

M: Yes, what you say is true. I liked it and I have read it fully. By correcting the seer, everything gets corrected. In the book there is talk of many seers, but in reality the seer is only one. The many are in the imagination of the seer only.

In this answer and in the answer that followed the Maharshi was gracious enough to point out a mistake in my treatment of the subject by showing me how I had based my arguments on a wrong presumption. He explained to me the correct viewpoint at some length. My purpose in writing that book was to prove that the concept of *maya* as propounded by Sankara is fully borne out by the modern theory of relativity. This theory, as is well known, maintains that time and space are purely relative notions dependent entirely on the conventions governing the observer and the object under observation, and that there is no such thing as objective space and time. When two observers, taking different positions in space, observe a particular event, they obtain different time-space measures that will conflict with each other and necessarily vitiate any conclusion they may arrive at concerning the particular event. Sri Maharshi pointed out to me that the very presumption of two observers being situated at two given points is itself an unwarranted one. It was a revelation to me that Sri Maharshi could judge off-hand, as it were, such modern theories as that of relativity, proceeding entirely on the basis of his own experience of the absolute.[12]

Verse sixteen of *Sat Darshana* clearly declares Sri Maharshi's views on space and time:

> Where is space without me, where is time? The body exists in space and time, but no body am I. Nowhere am I, in no time; yet I am everywhere and in all time.

This is the perfect spiritual experience that dispels all false

[12] Bhagavan's comment is not a refutation of the theory of relativity, it is simply an assertion that the standard way of illustrating it is based on an unsupportable premise.

notions about time and space. Time is not an objective reality with a beginning and an end. The very idea of attributing a beginning or an end to time is something absurd and fantastic, since what preceded and followed the beginning and end of time must also come within the time span. The approach to the problem of time as described by verse sixteen does away with past and future, the only reality being the eternal present. But such a description of the one reality as the ever-present and changeless Self demands of the earnest seeker the faith and conviction that the realisation of his perfection must be here and now and not in some remote future. Moralists never tire of pointing to some distant future as the golden age to come, preceded by a long period of evolution. But all evolutionary theories require a uniform, objective time. According to both Vedanta and modern science, there cannot be an objective time. The theory of relativity has finally demolished it. To try to build a theory of evolution conflicting with the established data of science and alien to the upanishadic conclusions as expressed by the *mahavakyas* may be more unhelpful than edifying.

And now, as previously promised, I should like to record some of Sri Maharshi's very interesting answers to various questions about the reality of the world. They are not part of a continuous dialogue, for I jotted the answers down at different times. Some of the questions were my own, but most were raised by fellow visitors to the ashram.

Q: Is the world real or false?

M: So long as there is mind, the world is there. During sleep there is no mind, so the world is not there.

Q: While I am sleeping, other people who are awake continue to see the world.

M: The people who are awake at that time are part of the world [whose existence you are trying to prove], so what they say cannot be taken as a piece of admissible evidence. At that time [when you are asleep] it [first] has to be proved whether or not other people exist. That which has to be proved cannot be taken for granted as existent. Their existence has to be proved independently, but such a proof cannot be found. Those who are awake have minds that are moving; that is why they

see the world. So, the world exists in relation to the mind. It is not a thing independent and existing by itself.

Q: What is the relationship between *maya*, the power that makes us take the world to be real, and *Atman*, the reality itself?

M: A man gets married in a dream and there the groom is real but the wife is false. And when he wakes up he is the same man as before. Similarly, the real *Atman* always remains as it is. It does not get affected or contaminated by *maya*. It does not marry either *maya* or *anatma* [the not-Self] because it is complete, whereas the substance of the world is unreal. The individual 'I' is like the dream state of the man. When it begins to arise, the mind and the sense organs begin to operate. When it goes, they also go away. The root of all perceived material things is this 'I'. *Aham*, 'I', is real, but *ahankara*, the ego 'I', is false.

Q: Just as in a rope the knowledge of the serpent is false, so in *Brahman* the knowledge of the world is false.

M: That is correct. It is not necessary to keep knowledge of a thing that is not real.

Q: It could be said the window frame has come out of the wood, but still it is not separate from the wood. If one can give up the knowledge of the work done on the wood, then it is wood only.

M: That is true.

Q: In a rope a snake is seen. It is possible to argue that, for the illusion to be effective, one must have seen a real snake at some other place and time in order to know what a snake looks like. Only then can the illusion occur. In the same way, if at some place the real world is seen, then only can an illusion of it appear in *Brahman*.

M: That [analogy] is known as *anyatha khyati* [an argument put forward by the *Nyaya* school of philosophy], but it has no validity.

Q: In the *alatha-shanti* of Gaudapada's *Karika* [v. 97], it is said that if the slightest *vaidharmata bhava* [the attitude that there is something that exists other than the Self] remains, then oneness will not be established and the breaking of the veil that covers the Self will not take place. In that context, what is the meaning of *vaidharmata?*

M: In that verse the term *vaidharmata* should be understood to be *parichinna bhava* [an attitude of restriction].

If you want God, he is there all the time. So long as the world is not realised to be false, thoughts of the world will keep on coming. So long as the snake is seen, the rope does not appear. The mind that creates the world will not be able to take the world as false. As it happens in the dream state, so it also happens in the waking state. Without the mind there is no world. In sleep, since there is no mind, there is no world. Therefore it is not necessary to think of the world that is imagined by the mind. That which is *nitya nivritta* [always removed, that is, never existing] need not be given any thought to. A barber, after having thrown out someone's hair does not count how many are black and how many are white as all of them have to be thrown away. Similarly, it is not necessary to count imaginary things. It is only necessary to cease to imagine that they are true.

To remove the snake from the rope, it is not necessary to kill the snake. In the same way it is not necessary to kill the mind. By understanding the complete non-existence of the mind, the mind will go away. The experience that is without the seer and the seen, that is without time and space, is the real experience.

When we have a dream, we see many varieties of forms. Out of them we believe one form to be 'my' form and we also believe that 'I am that'. If we are the manufacturer of the dream, then we are the actor in all the forms in the dream as well as the actor in our own form. The one who has the dream believes that all the forms [in the dream] are real, and that they are separate from each other. And he also believes that in the dream he himself has a form. He is not aware that he is both the actor of the dream and all the other forms [that he sees]. He realises on waking that everything in the dream was he and he alone. In the same way, a *jnani* knows that the world [being only a dream] is never created. Whatever is there is all his own Self, one and undivided.

Q: In golden ornaments both the gold and the ornaments seem to be real. The only difference is that the piece of gold does not have the same beauty as the ornament. Likewise, both *Brahman* and the world appear to be real.

M: Whether you keep the gold or the gold ornaments, in both, the basic material is the same. The name given to a form is for everyday activities. If there were a lot of gold ornaments lying around, and if we were to say, 'Please get the gold', the job could not be done. Similarly, there is only one 'I' and it is the same in all people, but for worldly activities we cannot say, 'Please call that "I"'. That is why some 'I's are called 'Ramachandran' and some 'Krishna Lal'. Even so, there is only one 'I' .

Q: If the 'I' at one place calls the 'I' at some other place 'I', many mistakes will happen.

M: During worldly activity, if your attention is fixed on the fundamental reality, there is no difficulty. But ordinary people forget the reality and take the name alone to be real. The different 'I's are not real. There is only one 'I'. The separate 'I' is like a watchman in a fort. He is like the protector of the body. The real owner in everybody is only the one real 'I'. So, when the separate 'I' surrenders to the real 'I', then, [because the idea of a separate self who 'owns' the body disappears], 'I' and 'mine' are eliminated. The true state comes into existence when, after sorting out what belongs to whom, the ego 'I' surrenders itself to the real owner.

Q: If such teachings are spread in the world there will be no wars.

M: [No reply.]

In the sequence of questions and answers that begins with the query about gold ornaments we have a typical response from Sri Maharshi. Although he would sometimes give detailed replies to questions of a philosophical nature, at other times he would try to divert the questioner's attention away from theoretical matters and instead talk about the Self, the impediments that prevented one from being aware of it, and the means by which a devotee could make himself aware of his own, inherent real nature. In the following sequence of questions and answers we see the Maharshi expounding on these practical topics. The first few questions about Self-knowledge were asked by a Gujarati visitor, the remainder by the other visitors.

Q: In order to make an effective effort for Self-knowledge, does one have to reduce other activities or not?

M: The Self has no relationship with either activity or non-activity. The Self remains as it is by its own *sakti*. Think of that.

Q: How to get Self-knowledge?

M: To whom does this question occur? You should think of him.

Q: Is *mula prakriti* [the seed or root out of which all material things evolve] the form of consciousness?

M: Yes.

Q: Is lower *prakriti* [matter] inert?

M: It appears to be inert. In reality there is only one essence and that is why everything is consciousness only.

Q: As a tree grows out of a seed, likewise does multiplicity come from the one?

M: When you realise the one, the many will not be seen.

Q: Then how did multiplicity come into being?

M: It is because of delusion that it is seen like that.

Q: How did delusion occur?

M: To whom does this question arise? Think of that.

Q: How to do that?

M: The delusion that has come by wrong thinking will go by correct thinking.

Q: What is the thing called *jivatma* [individual self]?

M: To whom does this question occur? Think of that, meaning, think of who you are. And by thinking of what you really are, all the difficulties will be removed.

Q: In one of your books it is written that the mind should be annihilated. How to do this work?

M: It will be easy to destroy the mind if one knows the real nature of the mind.

Q: Is the remembrance of past *samskaras* [the ingrained habits of the mind that cause it to behave in a particular way] called 'mind'?

M: The *samskaras* and the results of those *samskaras* are not real. During sleep they go away.

Q: How to control such a mind?

M: Except for enquiry into the self, there is no way that the mind can be destroyed.

Q: How to meditate?

M: Being aware of the Self is the real meditation. When the mind gives up its habit of choosing and deciding, it turns towards its own real nature. At that time it gets into the fundamental state. When the ego gets more powerful, entry into this state does not take place.

Q: Should we be patriotic and should we not serve our country?

M: First be what you are. Therein lies all truth and happiness. While trying to become someone else, the *ahankara* gets in. You think that the world will be conquered by your power, but when you turn inwards towards the Self, you will know that a higher power is working everywhere.

Q: Does God bestow grace on *jivas* or not?

M: However much you remember God, God remembers you much more.

Q: Why does God allow so much injustice to go on and why is there so much insufficiency among us?

M: Go to God and ask him about it.

Q: I cannot go there to him.

M: If you cannot go to him, how to ask the question? Weak people do not get liberation.

Q: What I cannot see with my eyes, I do not believe in. God is not seen by me, so I do not believe in him.

M: I cannot see your brains. So what is wrong if I believe that you have no brains?

Q: Will we have to undergo the fruits of our present karma in the next birth or not?

M: Are you born now? Why do you think of other births? The fact is, birth and death are not real. The thoughts of rebirth are the thoughts of ignorance. Through the thought of Self-knowledge the thoughts of birth and death get snapped and one gets established in the Self.

Truly, actions do not trouble us. It is only the sense of performing actions that does. The idea of doing the actions or leaving them is false. Think of the one who does the karma.

Q: We should make all men the same.

M: Put everyone to sleep and everyone will be the same.

Q: Who is sleeping?

M: The knower, *pramata,* is sleeping. *Adhistana* does not

wake up or sleep. During sleep, the knower, the means of knowing and the known get dissolved, leaving the activityless state of *Atman.*

Q: If the *Atman* is without activity at that time, how then does it know itself?

M: For the *Atman* there is nothing to know or be known. It is the one who has no knowledge who has to make an effort to gain knowledge. This is what takes place in the waking state. *Anatman,* which is the non-Self, which can also be called *chidabhasa,* the reflected consciousness, has the ignorance, so this reflected consciousness has to make an effort for *jnana,* or knowledge. Knowing and not knowing happen in the non-self. The Self does not have to obtain knowledge, for it is knowledge itself. When the knower, the reflected consciousness, is felt, at that time *ajnana* or ignorance is present. The one who feels this ignorance then makes an effort to attain *jnana,* which is knowledge. When the reflected consciousness gets the knowledge, it no longer remains. This is because the reflected consciousness always remains with ignorance or *mithyajnana* [false knowledge]. During sleep there is no reflected consciousness. So, [at that time] the false knowledge is not to be obtained. To know the Self means to know the form of the Self. This [explanation] is all from the point of view of the current conversation. In reality, there is only the *Atman.* Because this is so, there is nothing to know and nothing to be known.

Q: In Mysore State somebody has written a book called *Mulavidyanirasa* [*The Removal of Basic Ignorance*]. Have you seen it?

M: In the Self there is no ignorance, so there is no need to remove it.

Q: I do not know how to give up karma.

M: Why do you believe that you are the one who does the karma? Let me give you an example: think of how you came here. You got into a bullock cart at your house, reached the station and boarded the train. Then the train started and eventually reached the station where you got down. Then you got into a bullock cart again and now you are sitting here. When I ask you [about your trip] you say, 'I came here from my village'. Is this true? The cart and the train moved, not

you. Just as, through a mistake, you believe the movement of the cart and the train to be your own, so also all other actions, through a similar mistake, you believe to be yours. These actions are not yours, they are Bhagavan's.

Q: If one were to stay in such a state of non-action, the mind would become void and no worldly activities could be done.

M: First obtain this state where no differences arise and then tell me whether actions can be done or not. Truly speaking, so long as the body is there, some activity is bound to happen. Only the attitude 'I am the doer' has to be given up. The activities do not obstruct. It is the attitude 'I did' that is the obstruction.

Q: If such a sight of unity is given to everyone, they are likely to remain in this mode and fall into immorality.

M: Misconduct, hatred and attachment are the result of the differences caused by the discriminative intellect. When the proper sense of oneness comes, thoughts of misconduct will not arise.

Q: In the *nirvikalpa* state [the state in which no differences arise], if there is nothing there except the *Atman,* how does one get *ananda* [bliss]?

M: You think that you can only get happiness when there is contact with something separate from you. But that is not the truth. *Ananda* is the very nature of the Self. The happiness that you get from other things is part of the happiness of the *Atman,* but it is not the complete happiness. So long as an external object is required [for happiness], incompleteness is felt. When it is felt that the *Atman* alone is there, permanent happiness stays.

If it were not so and if happiness were to be obtained from external things, then, to give an example, as the number of people in a family increases, and the amount of one's wealth increases, happiness should increase to the same extent. And as the quantity of these things decreases, happiness should decrease by the same amount. Furthermore, during sleep, when external objects have all gone away, at that time unhappiness should be felt. In sleep, though, you feel that there is nothing. Yet, when a man wakes up from sleep, he says, 'I slept very happily'. So, when nothing exists except the *Atman,* then there is happiness.

Whenever the things we like appear before the *Atman,* at that time the mind feels the *Atman.* Truly speaking, *ananda* exists only within the *Atman,* and apart from it there is no other *ananda.* And that *ananda* is not separate or far away.

If you are in a state that is giving you the experience of *ananda,* at that time you are actually diving into the *Atman.* It is because of this diving into the *Atman* that you get the bliss of the *Atman.* However, because of your association with incorrect thoughts, you project [the cause of] the *ananda* on to external things. When you experience *ananda,* you are unknowingly diving into the *Atman.* The truth of one's own real nature, which is the *Atman,* is that it is an undivided oneness. One's own reality is *ananda.* That is what you are. If you were to dive knowingly into the *Atman,* with the conviction born of this experience, then the state of Self would be experienced.

Q: Worries of worldly life trouble me much and I do not find happiness anywhere.

M: Do these worries trouble you in sleep?

Q: No.

M: Are you the same person now as you were in sleep, or are you not?

Q: Yes.

M: So, it proves that the worries do not belong to you. Those who believe the mind to be real will not be able to subdue it. In the state in which the mind appears to be real, the thief [the mind] cheats by putting on the dress of the policeman [in order to pretend to catch himself]. Hence, we must know how to destroy the mind by knowing its real nature. People ask me how to control the mind. The answer is, 'Show me the mind'. It is but a bundle of thoughts. How will the mind, which is a collection of thoughts, come under control by a thought of controlling it? Reach its source, therefore. Seek the *Atman.* All misery will come to an end if you turn your mind inwards. If you feel that the world is created by the imagination of the individual soul, then that imagination must be given up. If you think that God has created the world, then surrender to Him all your responsibilities and leave the burden of the whole world to Him.

During the course of my visit I went through *Sri Ramana*

Gita, one of the ashram's publications. There is a very important verse in this work that was written by the sage himself and that was later incorporated in the book by Ganapati Muni, its compiler. The verse gives a synopsis of spiritual *sadhana* along with a categorical declaration concerning the absolute identity of *Brahman* with the Self. The verse runs as follows:

> In the interior of the cavity of the Heart the one Supreme Being [*Brahman*] shines as 'I'-'I', verily the *Atman*. Entering into the Heart with one-pointed mind either through self-enquiry or by diving within or by breath control, abide thou in *Atmanishta* [the state of being established in the Self].

I had a small doubt with regard to this description of the absolute Self or *Brahman* as residing in the heart. I asked Sri Maharshi if, as the verse declares, a fixed place in the body is assigned to the Self, would it not predicate finitude to That which is infinite and all pervading. If the Self is located in the heart within the physical body, would not the categories of time and space (that are necessarily applicable to the physical body) apply also to the Self Absolute?

Sri Maharshi graciously referred me to a very similar question put by Sri Rama to Sri Vasishta, remarking, 'An answer to this question is contained in a passage of *Yoga Vasishta*'.

He then referred to the book and read out the relevant verses:

> 21 When Rama asked, 'Which is the great mirror in which we see the image of things? What is it that is called the heart of all beings in the world?' Vasishta replied, 'When we reflect, we see that all the beings in the world have two different hearts.
> 22 'One of these is worth acceptance, the other worth rejection. Listen how they differ. The organ called the heart placed somewhere in the chest of the physical body is worth rejection. The Heart which is the form of pure Awareness is worth acceptance; it is both within and without – it has no inside or out.
> 23 'That indeed is the essential Heart and in it all the

world abides. It is the mirror in which all things are seen. It is the source of all wealth. Hence, awareness may be termed the Heart of all beings. The Heart is not a part of the perishable body, inert like a stone.
24 'Therefore, by the practice of merging the ego in the pure Heart which is all Awareness, the tendencies of the mind as well as the mind itself will be subdued.'[13]

The Maharshi then summarised the verses and gave me his interpretation of them.

'Vasishta says that there are two kinds of heart, one that is all-pervading and should be 'accepted' and another that is limited by time and space and which should be 'rejected'. The all-pervading Heart is within as well as without, and when the 'body-am-I' idea disappears, it is neither within nor without. That is the real Heart. In that [Heart] all things appear as images in a mirror. When the mind gets rid of all desires, the vital breath gets quiet, and the all-pervading Heart is experienced as such.'

I sought further clarification on this matter by asking him two further questions:

Q: Is the source of the 'I' in the body?

M: Because the ego is in the body, enquiry into it is first conducted within the body. When the source is found out, there will be neither in nor out. Enquiry into the Heart is enquiry into the 'I'. 'I' and the Heart are the same.

Q: Is the Heart in the body on the right side?

M: The place where the 'I' arises is the Heart. Know the Heart as the centre of knowledge.

I then enquired of Sri Maharshi whether this description from *Yoga Vasishta* of the process of realisation could be stated in somewhat different terms.

[13] The original Sanskrit verses are from *Yoga Vasishta, Upasana Khanda,* ch. 78, vv. 32–8. Bhagavan translated them into Tamil and then included them in *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*, vv. 21–4. This is the version I have used here, taken from *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, 6th revised edition, 1996.

'When a man enquires into himself,' I began to say, 'and tries to find out the root of the "I", he reaches the state of the witnessing Self, and when the field of the witnessing Self begins to expand so as to cover all the objective existence, it gets identified with the all-pervading *Brahman* and objects lose their separate existence.'

Before I could elaborate on this any more, Sri Maharshi intervened and said: 'This state is explained in the *Bhagavatam*: "Not even for a minute are these sages, beginning with Brahma, Sanaka, and Suka, separated from the *Brahman*-filled state."'[14]

Being an ardent student of the *Srimad Bhagavatam,* it occurred to me at that moment how incongruous it was for Suka to recite all the 18,000 verses of the epic before King Parikshit if Suka was really in that pure brahmic state.

I at once referred my doubt to Sri Maharshi who promptly replied by saying, 'Reading or not reading, and as a matter of fact anything done or not done, makes not the slightest difference to the sage in that brahmic state.'

From a close study of Sri Maharshi's teachings one learns that it is this brahmic state that is referred to by him as *sahajatma-nishtha or sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi,* that is, the natural and spontaneous abidance in the Self Absolute. The life of Sri Maharshi ever since he came to Tiruvannamalai just over half a century ago as described in the monumental book *Self-Realization*, and his day-to-day life as we see it now, are the proof and a visible demonstration of that brahmic state.

Since the Maharshi, on the basis of his own experience of the Self, often gave interesting and sometimes novel interpretations of religious texts, I decided to ask him about the first verse of the *Isavasyopanishad* since I had often been puzzled by its apparently contradictory statements. The verse says:

> All this, whatsoever moves in the universe, including the universe, itself moving, is pervaded or clothed by the Lord. That renounced, you should enjoy. Covet not anybody's wealth.

[14] According to Swami Madhavatirtha it was this exchange that persuaded him that he should devote his time to getting established in *Brahman* rather than lecturing and writing.

The first sentence declares that the one Supreme Being, eternal and immutable, is the basis of everything changeable. In other words, this sentence maintains that this mutable world is only a divine manifestation. Nevertheless, it is this world that the second sentence of the verse enjoins the aspirant to renounce in order to obtain true happiness. The contradiction between the first two ideas is thus very patent. If the world is nothing but the divine, why should the aspirant be asked to renounce it since the entire manifested existence is nothing but the one divine substance? What is it that should be renounced?

'One must renounce the wrong knowledge,' replied the Maharshi when I asked him about this, 'that anything but the divine exists. That is, one must give up the notion that there is any duality or multiplicity, whatever the manifested existence may appear to be. The second sentence means that one should give up everything except the knowledge that the world is *Iswara rupa* [the form of God]. That is, one should give up ignorance or differentiation.'

Before I give the rest of Sri Maharshi's observations, let me say that this interpretation of the *Upanishad* is very original and, I think, unanticipated by any commentator, ancient or modern. There is perhaps none that does not take for granted an implicit contradiction between the two lines of this verse. But Sri Maharshi finds not even an apparent contradiction.

Sri Maharshi continued his commentary by saying, 'The Supreme Being is the only reality, one and unchangeable. It alone is and it alone sustains the apparent multiplicity. Therefore, renounce the knowledge that anything except the divine exists. In other words, renounce the sense of duality or multiplicity. Then, as a matter of course, you will not covet anything, because one covets a thing only when one believes there is something apart from oneself to be coveted. The initial error lies in the sense of duality whereby one separates oneself from the thing coveted. The ignorant man believes that coveting a thing and getting it is a source of joy. Not so. He alone enjoys who renounces the idea of separateness. That is, his is the true bliss who knows that the one, unchangeable Supreme Being, identical with himself, and with everything that exists, is the one and only reality.'

At this point two other devotees decided that it was an opportune moment to raise their own queries about the meaning of various upanishadic texts:

Q: It is said in the *Upanishads* that 'God took many forms'.
M: This is meant for people with ordinary intellects. In the sight of Bhagavan there is no multiplicity. In his sight it is 'complete, one and perfect only' [from the benedictory verse of the *Isavasyopanishad*]. If a person dispenses with his ego, then, in his sight, the many do not remain. Therefore, in the sight of Bhagavan, how can the many remain?

The second devotee then asked his question:

Q: In the third mantra of the *Isavasyopanishad* it says: '*Brahman* moves and *Brahman* does not move'. How can these two contradictory truths both be within *Brahman*?
M: The truth of not doing anything is the truth of one's real nature. Action or doing can only be seen from a relative point of view.

Then, at the end of a brief discussion between Chadwick and myself on this subject, Sri Maharshi intervened and said, 'When one gives up the thought of the one who sees, nothing can then be proved. Everything that is seen is encompassed in the thought of the one who sees, who is himself a thought. If anything is seen except *Brahman,* the reason is the wrong condition of the one who sees.'

A third devotee, who had obviously thought about the consequences of Sri Maharshi's explanations, then raised a very interesting point.

'It is no doubt good that the *sastras* should admonish the layman and make him give up the notion of duality,' he remarked, 'but how are we to reconcile this teaching of the *sastras* with a no less important injunction, namely, that of self-surrender to the divine? If there is no duality whatsoever, where is the necessity or possibility for self-surrender?'

Sri Maharshi's exposition of the inner meaning of the first verse of the *Isavasyopanishad* upheld the absolute oneness of reality. We were all very eager to hear how he would

incorporate the dualities inherent in the theory and practice of surrender into his interpretation of the verse. I may say, before I give his answer, that Sri Maharshi's replies were always very cogent. Every word he spoke seemed to have a force that made disputation entirely out of place. On this occasion he at first appeared to ignore completely the visitor's question. For a minute or two he was silent, thus rousing all the more our curiosity to know how he would tackle the question. I shall try to give Sri Maharshi's reply briefly and, as far as possible, in his own words.

'We are familiar with a custom among some people in these parts that is based on deep sentiments of devotion to Lord Ganesha. Daily worship to his image (which is found installed in all the temples of the locality) is an indispensable ritual for these people before their daily meal. A certain poor traveller of this persuasion was passing through a sparsely inhabited country. Not finding a temple of Ganesha anywhere nearby in which he might perform his daily worship to the image before his midday meal, he resolved to make an idol of the deity out of a small quantity of jaggery [crystalline brown sugar] he was carrying with him. Having made the idol out of the jaggery, he proceeded with the ritual in right earnest. And then, to his bewilderment, he found that he had nothing sweet in his baggage for a food offering [*naivedya*] since he had converted all the jaggery he had into the idol. So, since no worship is complete without the customary *naivedya,* the simple-minded wayfarer pinched out a bit of jaggery from the idol itself and offered the piece as *naivedya* to the deity. It did not occur to him that in the very act of pinching out a bit of jaggery he had defiled the very idol that he wanted to worship and had therefore made both the worship and the offering worthless.[15]

'Your idea of self-surrender is nothing better than the offering made by the wayfarer. By presuming your existence as something apart from the Supreme Being, you have merely defiled it. Whether you surrender yourself or not, you have never been apart from that Supreme Being. Indeed, at this present moment, even as in the past or the future, the divine alone is.

[15] Hindus believe that it is an act of desecration to mutilate an idol. They also believe that if a statue is mutilated or deformed, it loses its power.

'First the ego gets separated from *Brahman*. Then the same ego seeks the feet of the Lord. But if it were not to get separated, there would be no need of surrender. By reducing the quantity of jaggery in the jaggery Ganesha, does its value go down? One should have the habit of trying to understand that everything is one only, and one should maintain a firm belief in that.'

I should point out, before I conclude, that although Sri Maharshi often gave forthright answers to questions, at no time did he insist that he alone was right, or that all people should follow his teachings. During one conversation that I noted down he pointed out that the evangelical fervour that unfortunately can still be found in many religious zealots is merely a manifestation of their egos.

'On many occasions, when the subject of religion arises,' he remarked, 'men cannot understand their own errors. In many places the ego comes up in the form of saying, "My religion should be embraced by all".'

I saw a good example of the Maharshi's disinclination to impose Hindu ideas on people who would not appreciate them when a group of devout Muslims came to see him.

One of them asked, 'What is the best aim of human life?'

Sri Maharshi replied, 'It is Islam, which means "to remain at the feet of God". And as a consequence of that one gets *salaam,* which means peace.'

The Maharshi never asked people to change their religion. If Christians, Muslims, etc. came to him for advice, he would propound the essential mystical teachings of their own religion and ask the adherents of those religions to strive for union with their own particular chosen God.

Nor did the Maharshi ever encourage, as some Gurus do, public worship of his form. He refused to let himself be garlanded, would not permit anyone to do *puja* to him, and would not accept anything to eat that could not be served equally to all who were present. In the early days of the ashram he even performed menial daily chores along with all the other ashram residents. The only outward sign of reverence that he would permit was prostration before him, and even then he would only permit it in the hall where he gave public audiences.

One devotee asked him about this, saying, 'If the same Siva

is in everyone, why do you allow people to prostrate to you?'

Sri Maharshi, who saw the same Self in all, answered by saying, 'Before a devotee salutes me, I [mentally] prostrate to the Siva who is within him'.

I cannot leave this account without including an entertaining story, told in Sri Maharshi's hall while I was there, of a devotee who had had a desire to go and meditate in a cave on the hill. Sri Maharshi gave him permission to go. The disciple went to the cave, but many snakes were there. A little later, while the disciple was sitting in meditation, a snake came and hit his hood on the man's thigh. The disciple opened his eyes and discovered that the snake had not bitten him. The snake went away and the disciple started meditating again. Later, the snake came back and repeated its strange action.

The disciple thought to himself, 'If this keeps on happening, it will not be possible to stay in this cave and meditate'.

He went to see Sri Maharshi who immediately asked him what had happened.

After the disciple had narrated the whole incident, the Maharshi commented, 'The snake went to you to say, "You must stay here only". If you could have caught the snake by the mouth he would have said, "Stay here only". God came to test you in the form of a snake.'

After listening to this answer the disciple went to back to his cave.

There is a characteristic way in which Sri Maharshi draws the aspirants' pointed attention to the great advaitic truth he has realised and which finds spontaneous expression in every act of his daily life. In his biography one comes across several occasions when Sri Maharshi made profound observations on daily occurrences in order to teach the practice of true wisdom in life. Let me illustrate the point from my personal experience. On the day I was to leave the ashram I had arranged for the purchase of some fruits locally, intending to offer them to Sri Maharshi. When the time arrived for me to take leave of him, I put the fruits reverentially before him and said in a few words that I would soon be leaving the place.

Sri Maharshi smiled benignly and remarked with a twinkle in his eye. 'And so, you are offering jaggery to Lord Ganesha!'

I could understand that he was referring to the parable he

had related on an earlier occasion about self-surrender, but how aptly he found the occasion to drive home in a very practical way the moral of the parable, namely that all is nothing but the divine!

Whether Sri Maharshi spoke in order to clear the doubts of an earnest aspirant or whether he sat in perfect silence, one received a fresh illumination, a new angle of vision and sometimes a very inspiring reorientation of one's spiritual outlook. Embodying the advaitic truth, the one universal spirit transcending the bounds of time and space, Sri Maharshi truly represents in himself the University of Spiritual Education, the ancient Hindu culture of the Heart. The so-called university education imparted to the modern youth in our colleges has neither the vision of unity nor the spirit of universality. The youth of the present day will be the citizens of the future. The aim of their education should be to know the unity and oneness of existence that they may fulfil the duties and obligations of world citizenship they are bound to inherit in the time to come. To know this truth of unity and oneness of existence, all who desire the culture of the Heart should seek the company of the venerable sage at the hill of the holy beacon [Arunachala], since he speaks, lives and embodies in himself that peace, unity and oneness of existence. Sri Ramanasramam, the abode of the sage who represents the advaitic truth, is the university of universities.

Sri Ramana Maharshi's Life – a brief outline

1879	Born in Tiruchuzhi, a small town in modern-day Tamil Nadu, to Sundaram Iyer and Azhagammal. He was given the name Venkataraman.
1891	Moved with his family to Dindigul, a nearby town.
1892	His father died. Venkataraman then moved to Madurai with his family.
1896	His 'death experience' in his family home culminated in Self-realisation. At the end of August he left home, without telling his family, and moved to Arunachala (Tiruvannamalai), where he spent the rest of his life. He spent the first few weeks of his time there in the Arunachaleswara Temple.
1897	Moved to Gurumurtam, a temple about a mile from town, and lived for a year and a half either in the shrine or in a nearby mango orchard.
1898	His uncle Nelliappa Iyer and his mother visited him and tried to persuade him to return home, but he refused. Moved to Pavalakundru, a shrine on a rocky mound to the north of the main temple.
1899	He began to live on the lower slopes of Arunachala, mostly in Virupaksha Cave, but also occasionally in Guhai Namasivaya Temple, Mango Tree Cave and Sadguruswami Cave.
1907	He was given the name 'Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi' by Ganapati Muni.
1916	Moved to Skandashram.
1922	His mother died in May this year and was buried on the southern side of Arunachala, at the foot of the hill. A few months later Bhagavan left Skandashram and began living near his mother's *samadhi*. This became the site of Sri Ramanasramam. Bhagavan remained there till he passed away in April 1950.

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N. R. Krishnamurti Aiyer

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Chalam and Souris

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Glossary

abhishekam — An act of ritual worship in which a deity is washed or bathed with various liquids.

adhistana — The substratum; the underlying reality in which all physical and mental phenomena appear and disappear.

aham — I; '*aham Brahman*' is 'I am Brahman'.

ahankara — The ego; the mental faculty that identifies itself as an individual being.

ajnana — Ignorance; absence of awareness of the Self; the opposite of *jnana*, true knowledge.

ajnani — An ignorant one; one who is not aware that *jnana* is his true nature.

Aksharamanamalai — A 108-verse poem addressed to Arunachala, written by Bhagavan in 1913.

ananda — Bliss.

annas — An obsolete unit of Indian currency. In Bhagavan's lifetime the rupee was divided into sixteen *annas*.

arati — That part of a *puja* in which lighted camphor is ceremonially waved in front of a deity and then offered to worshippers.

Atman — The Self; held by advaitins to be identical with *Brahman*.

bhajans — Devotional songs addressed to a Hindu deity.

bhakta — A devotee.

bhakti — Devotion.

bhiksha — Food offered to *sadhus* by lay people. It can range from food put in a begging bowl to a feast given to large numbers of people.

brahmachari — A celibate; a member of the first *asrama* or stage of life.

brahmacharya — Celibacy; the first Hindu stage of life in which one studies with a religious teacher and remains single.

Brahman	The impersonal absolute reality of Hinduism.
darshan	To see or be seen by a Hindu deity or Guru.
Deepam	In this book, a winter festival in which a fire is lit on top of Arunachala.
dharma	Right action; moral duty; divine law; religious tradition.
dhyana	Meditation.
giri	Hill or mountain; *giri pradakshina* is circumambulating a mountain.
homas	Vedic rites in which offerings are ceremonially thrown into a fire.
iddlies	Lens-shaped rice cakes; the staple breakfast fare of most South Indians.
Iswara	The personal God of Hinduism.
japa	The repetition of God's name or of any other combination of sacred words.
jayanti	In this book, the birthday of Bhagavan and the celebrations that are associated with it.
jiva	The individual self or soul.
jivanmukta	One who is enlightened while still alive, as opposed to one who attains liberation at the moment of death.
jnana	True knowledge; realisation of one's true nature.
jnani	One who has a direct awareness of himself as *jnana*; an enlightened person.
kevala nirvikalpa samadhi	A trance-like state in which one is aware of the Self but unaware of one's body or the world; a temporary experience of the Self in which outer awareness is lost.
kumkum	A red-coloured powder that is distributed as *prasad* at the end of *pujas*. Recipients then make a mark on their forehead with it.
lila	Divine play; the concept that all the activities of the world are an entertaining drama scripted by God.
lingam	A vertical column of stone with a rounded upper end. Installed in the inner shrines of all Siva temples, it is regarded by devotees as a physical manifestation of the deity.

maha	Great or big.
mahasamadhi	The moment when an enlightened being leaves his body.
mahatmas	Great souls or great beings.
mahavakyas	Four upanishadic sayings that affirm the nature of reality and the identity between the individual self and the absolute underlying reality.
mantapam	A Hindu architectural structure that generally consists of a stone roof and supporting stone pillars, but no walls.
math	A Hindu centre or institution, often monastic in nature, and frequently set up to commemorate a great saint of the past.
mauna	Silence; a synonym for the thought-free experience of the Self.
maya	Illusion; the power that makes the unreal world appear real.
namaskaram	A gesture of obeisance, often a full-length prostration on the floor, but sometimes merely a standing gesture in which one indicates respect by putting the palms together.
nirvikalpa samadhi	See *kevala nirvikalpa samadhi*.
parayana	The chanting of scriptural works.
pradakshina	Circumambulation of a sacred object.
prana	Sometimes called 'vital breath', it is the life force that animates the body
prarabdha	Destiny; the script that one has been allotted for this life; karma carried over from previous lives that has to be experienced in the current one.
Prasad	Anything offered to a deity or Guru becomes *prasad* when some or all of it is returned to the donor or distributed publicly. Most commonly it would be food or *vibhuti* and *kumkum*.
puja	Ritualistic worship or adoration of a deity.
rasam	A highly spiced soup served at most South Indian meals. Its principal ingredients are pepper and tamarind.
rishis	Seers; spiritual adepts who have seen into the nature of reality.

Rs	An abbreviation of rupee.
Sadguru	A fully enlightened Guru who is established in *sat*, the underlying being.
sadhaka	A spiritual seeker.
sadhana	Spiritual practice; a means for getting enlightenment.
sadhus	Full-time spiritual seekers who have renounced worldly responsibilities in order to seek enlightenment.
sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi	The state of complete enlightenment in which one can function normally and naturally in the world. *Sahaja* means natural. See also *nirvikalpa samadhi*.
sakti	Spiritual power; a goddess who personifies such power.
samadhi	A direct but temporary experience of the Self, usually in a trance-like condition with no outer awareness; the tomb of a saint.
sambar	A spicy sauce that accompanies all South Indian meals.
samsara	The continuous cycle of death and rebirth to which the *jiva* is subject up till the moment of liberation; the phenomenal world of names and forms, especially as it appears to the unenlightened mind.
sankalpa	Will or intention; the faculty of the mind that chooses or makes decisions.
sannyasa	The fourth *asrama* or stage of life in which one completely renounces the world and all one's relationships and in which one lives as a mendicant monk.
sannyasi	One who has taken *sannyasa*. See the above entry.
sarvadhikari	'Ruler of all'; the title by which Chinnaswami, the manager of Ramanasramam, was known.
sastras	Scriptures.
siddhas	Perfected beings; it particularly denotes those who have mastered *siddhis*, supernatural powers.
siddhis	Supernatural powers.

Sri	An honorific prefix denoting respect.
sruti	A single note that sounds continuously during Indian music.
stitha prajna	One who is established in transcendental wisdom.
tapas	Arduous spiritual practice, often involving bodily mortification. Its aim is to burn off spiritual impurities.
ucchistam	Food left on the Guru's plate after he has finished eating.
upadesa	Spiritual teachings, particularly those given to a disciple by a Guru.
uppuma	A thick, spicy porridge made from semolina and vegetables.
vasanas	The tendencies of the mind that make one think and behave in repeated, habitual ways.
Vedanta	The philosophy derived from the *Upanishads*, the concluding portions of the *Vedas*. Vedanta means 'end of the *Vedas*'.
Vedas	The highest, oldest and most respected scriptures of Hinduism.
vibhuti	Sacred ash; made from burnt cow dung, it is dispensed at the end of *pujas*. The officials at Ramanasramam generally enclose a small packet in all their outgoing letters.
vichara	Self-enquiry.

Index

The index is divided into two parts. The first section is an alphabetical listing of topics, mostly proper nouns and technical terms. The second section, arranged in numerical order, gives a brief summary of all the events in which Bhagavan played a role.

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3 B speaks about not needing to eat.
3-5 R's lack of money.
6 B's debts.
6-7 R wants to be *sannyasin*.
8 B's accident on Arunachala.
8-9 B's mother's vision of B.
9-10 R's visions of B.
10 B urinating on statue.
10-11 B stealing lawyer's papers.
11 R's brother's visit.
12 R's father's experiences.
12-14 B tells stories about devout kings.
14-16 R encourages visitors to go to B.
16-17 B's desire to appear ordinary.
17 B cures leper with *vibhuti*.
17-18 B talks about categories of *jnanis*.
18 B takes food from sudra.
18 B alone recognising *mahatmas*.
18 B speaks of differences between *jnanis* and gods.
19 B speaks of *jnanis* defying Yama.

19 B saying that *jnana* is very easy.
20 B swimming in the early morning.
20 B's knowledge of past, present and future.
20-1 Dog in *nirvikalpa samadhi.*
21 B tells Dattatreya story.
22 Golden mongoose visits Skandashram.
22-3 Nondi Payan story.
23-4 B's new 'manager'.
24 B speaks of devotees' egos.
24 B forced to eat *ganja.*
25 B unaware of bleeding leg.
25 B unaware of thorns in his feet.
25-6 B's skin changing after enlightenment.
26 B's skin reacts to hugs.
26 B feels pain when devotees prostrate.
26-7 R tells B about his doubts.
27 B talks about karma.
28 Malayali yogi lectures B.
28 Ramaswami Pillai loses key.
29-30 R's horoscope.
30 B's horoscope.
30–1 B repairs steps.
31-3 R's family disasters.
33-4 B's worries about marriage.
34 Devotees losing peace away from B.
34-5 Manager's fund raising.
35-6 B tells Swaroopananda story.
36 Doing *pradakshina* of B.
37 B's sofa.
37 B compelled to eat at a table.
37-8 B speaks about yearning for *darshan.*

Sivaprakasam Pillai

40-1 Early visits to B.
41-2 Construction of Skandashram.
42-5 SP's early experiences with B.
45-6 B speaks of SP's devotion.
49-50 SP's experiences away from B.
62 Balananda spits on B.

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74-5 Meets B at Virupaksha Cave.
75 B's uncle crying.
76-7 Death of Palaniswami.
78 Serving food at Skandashram.
79 Serving Bhagavan first.
79-80 Nondi eats with B.
80 B eats A's *murukkus.*
81-2 Eating from B's leaf.
81-2 B speaks about *sankalpa.*
82-3 Going up Arunachala with B.
83-6 Stories of B's mother.
86-7 A gets *upadesa* from B.
87-9 Ritual worship of B.
89-90 Jnanasambandhar comparison.
90 A donates provisions for brahmins.
91 A stops bringing food.
91-2 B's *mahasamadhi.*

Sadhu Natanananda

93-7 Early meetings with B.
97-8 B says N is ready for realisation.
99-100 N's first visit.
102-3 B speaks about grace.
103-4 Visitors who assume B is unqualified.
109 Lakshmi in *samadhi.*
110-2 Ganapati Muni's first visit.
112 Polish woman's vision.
114-6 Serving the Guru correctly.
116-8 Prostrating to B.
118-9 B's *prasad* and *ucchistam.*
119-20 Initiation and *upadesa.*
121-7 Correct behaviour for *sadhus.*
127-8 *Jnani's* state and behaviour.
128-30 *Jnani's* lack of *prarabdha.*
131 Light appearing after B's death.
132 B as witness.
132-3 *Jnani's* true state.

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137-8 K Meets Ganapati Muni.
138 Prostrates to B.
138-9 K wants to fight with B.
139-40 K's impressions of Ramanasramam.

141-2 K's health problems.
142 Receives books from B.
143 B gives advice on *japa*.
143-4 K's photo commission.
144-5 K's vision of Siva.
144-6 More health problems.
145-7 Stories of B's boyhood.
147-8 B puts foot on Rangan's head.
148-9 K's vision of Meenakshi.
150 K's vision of Varaha.
151 K sees garland inside Arunachala.
151 *Tanga-kai* stories.
152-3 Climbing Arunachala.
153-4 K's son receives stick from B.
154-5 Ardhanareswara visions.
155-7 K's *kundalini* experiences.
158 K begins intensive Rama *japa*.
159-62 Father's hernia problems.
162-4 K wants heart-lotus vision.
164-5 K's heart-centre experience.
166 B gives K *Ribhu Gita*.
167 K gets final *upadesa* from B.
167-8 Mother's Temple disputes.
169 Buying Tiruchuzhi house.
169-70 Father's hernia story.
171 K's father appointed manager of Tiruchuzhi house by B.
171-2 Harijan woman's baby.
172-3 B speaks about health benefits of *samadhi*.
174 Final *darshan* and aftermath.

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177-80 C's discomfort on first visit.
178-9 C defends Ramanasramam.
180-3 S begins her practice.
183-4 S's first visit.
184-5 Problems with ashram officials.
187-8 Draupadi Temple beggar.
188 Blind Muslim from Peshawar.
190-2 B's attitude to ashram management.
191-4 B's paradoxical behaviour.
192-3 B not liking complaints.
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196 *Sadhu* gets *darshan*.
197 Devotees' food offerings.
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201 Stories about religious orthodoxy.
202 B caring for animals.
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203 The disappearing clock.
203 B's attitude to visitors.
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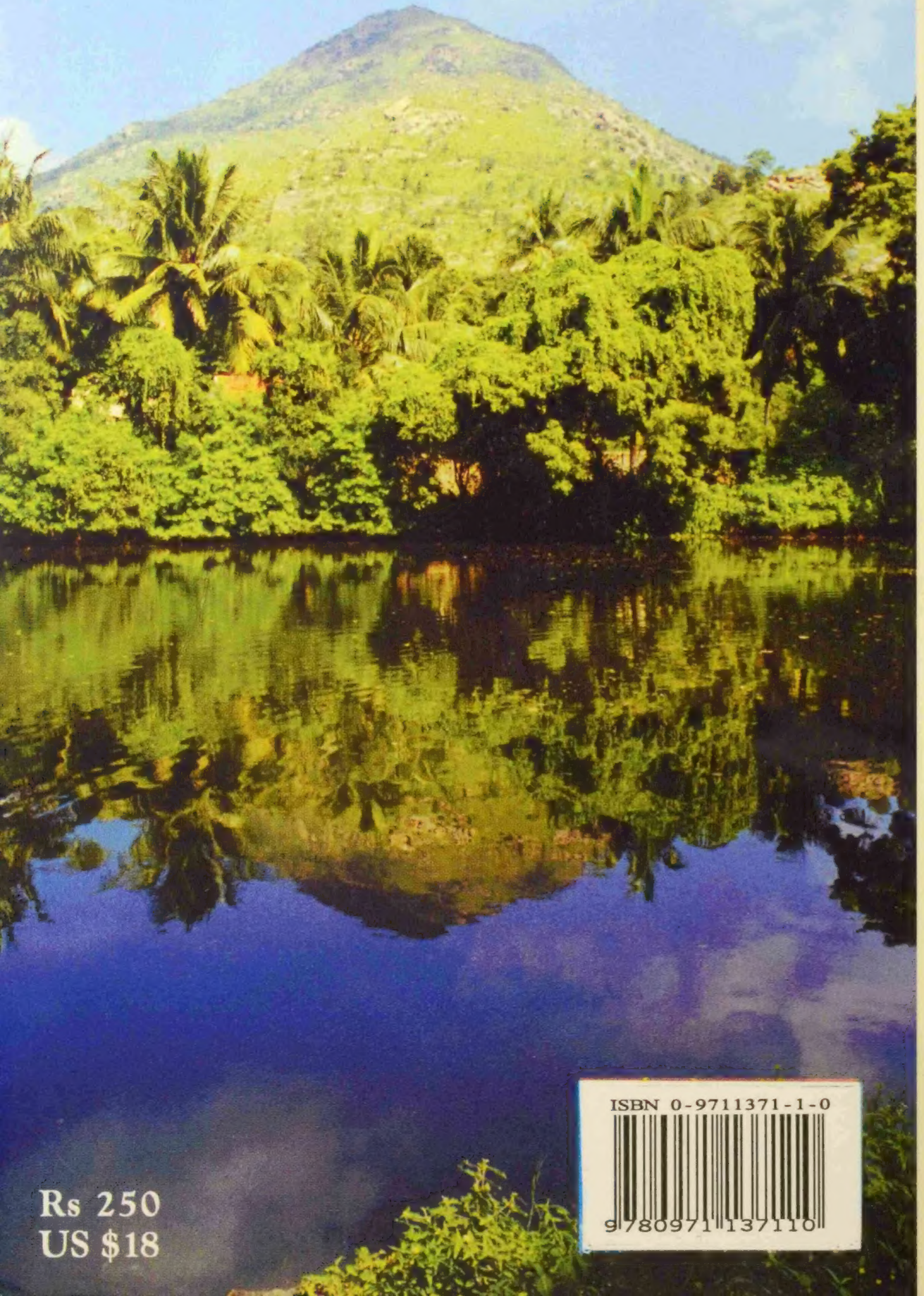

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